SHADOWRUN

HARD TARGETS

CATALYST game labs

DEEP SHADOWS SOURCEBOOK

HARD TARGETS
CATALYST
game labs™

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JACKPOINT

CONNECTING TO JACKPOINT VPN...
...IDENTITY SPOOFED
...ENCRYPTION KEYS GENERATED
...CONNECTED TO ONION ROUTERS

>>>LOGIN: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
>>>ENTER PASSCODE: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
...BIOMETRIC SCAN CONFIRMED
YOU'RE IN. USE IT WELL.

"IT IS COLD AT SIX-FORTY IN THE MORNING ON A MARCH DAY IN PARIS, AND SEEMS EVEN COLDER WHEN A MAN IS ABOUT TO BE EXECUTED BY FIRING SQUAD." -FREDERICK FORSYTH

JACKPOINT STATS

Interaction rate: +26%
Posts per hour: +7%
Today's content quality (signal:noise): 7:6

LATEST NEWS

- <112877> Never thought I'd say this but—stop treating the newbies so nicely. They need to see us in all of our raw reality. Let loose. –Glitch

PERSONAL ALERTS

- You have 6 new private messages.
- Your internal Q score is 43 (up 4 points)
- You have 3 new responses to your JackPoint posts.
- You have 1 new friend request; 6 friends have dropped you.
- **PDA:** Your friendly neighborhood arms dealer expects to run out of EX-ex ammo by 11 a.m.

There are 2 members online and in your area.
Your current rep score: 166 (58% Positive)

THE INNER CIRCLE

You are visible to your closest 5 levels of contacts.
Your Eyes Only posts have been viewed 17 times
Current Time: 28 Nov 2077, 1136 hours

WELCOME BACK TO JACKPOINT, OMAE:

Your last connection was severed 22 hours, 32 minutes, and 15 seconds ago.

TODAY'S HEADS UP

- Be more human than human, more troll than troll—whatever it takes. [Tag: Chrome Flesh]
- You could hang out at these places, too, if you were willing to sell your soul [Tag: Sprawl Sites: Corporate Hideouts]

INCOMING

- The Matrix has become the home of a number of different "friends." [Tag: 10 AIs]
- The Neo-Anarchists aren't the only ones who gather in tribes. [Tag: Virtual Tribes]

TOP NEWS ITEMS

- Renraku and Ares spokespeople in Seattle both decline to offer a vote of confidence for Kenneth Brackhaven. Brackhaven Investments total net worth drops by an estimated 132 million nuyen. Link
- Tír na nÓg representatives decry "highly unwarranted" intrusion by Nadja Daviar and the Draco Foundation investigating alleged irregularities in the manasphere within the nation's borders. Link
- Pathfinder Multimedia anticipating "unprecedented cooperation and access" for "docu-drama" series looking into homicide investigations by the Sioux National Police. Link

INTRODUCTION

Shadowrunners will punch you in the face and tear out your nose hairs, one by one, before admitting they do anything like the megacorps. But like the corps, and like billions of humans before them, they share a tendency for euphemism. "Assassination" is a loaded word, and "cold-blooded slaughter" doesn't sound good at all. Since it's the type of work people are willing to pay good money for, they need a name for this activity, so they gave it one: wetwork. Some runners refuse to do it on principle, others draw a line about who they will kill and why in an effort to believe that they are not as damned as their conscience sometimes tells them they are. No one can ignore it.

In the end, when the rubber meets the road—or, more appropriately, when the bullet meets the flesh—runners will do what they need to in order to survive, and chances are good that will involve wetwork. Maybe they'll come in on the guardian angel side of the job, protecting people targeted from assassination or tracking down hardened killers. Or maybe the lure of large amounts of money will pull them across the line into the realm of paid killers. They may be staining their conscience, but they'll have plenty of long nights to think about the many ways the money they are earning can bring them some degree of comfort.

If you're a shadowrunner who is going to be involved in wetwork, either on the prevention or commission side, *Hard Targets* is what you need. It starts with **Desperate Times**, an overview of many hotspots in the world and the situations that are leading people to put out more and more money to fund wetwork missions. The next chapter, **... and Desperate Measures**, gets into some of the nuts and bolts of the assassination business, looking at some of the jobs that are out there and what runners need to do to start claiming the money attached to them. **Killers, Saviors, and Hunters** looks at some of the notable assassins of the Sixth World so that players can learn about the competition—or the people they'll need to stop.

Then there's **Havana: Dale a Todo Meter!**, which looks at the wild and wooly city of Havana in the Caribbean League, a hotspot for all sorts of wetwork jobs. Following that, **Becoming Death** looks at the different ways people fall into the assassination game, while also providing a detailed look at what assassins need to know and do in order to wind up on the successful end of their wetwork jobs. **The Wetwork Toolkit** follows that up with some tools, gear, magic, and other equipment that should be on the shopping list of any bleeding-edge assassin. To wrap it up, **Game Information** offers plot hooks, Life Modules, and more for players and gamemasters putting a wetwork spin on their *Shadowrun* games.

With this information, runners can decide what wetwork jobs they will take, which ones they will hinder, which lives they will save, and which they will take. They can claim the power waiting for them—as long as they accept the corruption that inevitably comes with it.

JUSTICE FOR HIRE

One man.

That's what it all came down to. Three weeks of prep work and planning, all to eliminate one man.

The thought snuck into Ase's mind as she cycled through the security camera feeds. Her mind tended to wander at times like these, the calms before the storms, especially when her job was reduced to watching and waiting. Like now.

Still, she couldn't deny that even this relatively mundane duty gave her a bit of an ego boost. Sitting in the team's van, decked into enough cameras to oversee every square inch of a block of Downtown Seattle, Ase truly felt like the All-Seeing Eye that inspired her runner name.

Cut that drek out. You're a professional, dammit.

The mental rebuke dope-slapped Ase back to reality, refocusing her on the task at hand: providing overwatch and coordination for her team.

Their mission was the elimination of a Knight Errant cop named Captain Daniel West. Not just a run-of-the-mill beat cop, mind: he was the head of the Renton precinct and a fifteen-year veteran.

He was also a racist and a murderer hiding behind the authority of his position. Not in the eyes of the law, of course; internal investigations had ruled all of the metahuman deaths at his hands "justified"—twenty-seven such deaths since KE took over the Seattle policing contract. Never mind that none of those metahumans were armed. There was the troll he shot in the back five times—but it was a troll, who automatically looked threatening, so of course West was at risk, right? Besides, five shots were the *minimum* required to bring down a troll. To make things worse, West's record of brutality went hand in hand with a massive increase in the number of anti-meta brutality complaints against the Renton precinct's officers since he took it over two years ago. "Just criminals who were mad they got caught," according to West's press releases.

Bad stuff if you were a metahuman, and it was apparently about to get worse. According to the guy who hired Ase's team, KE Seattle Division head Ellen Ward was due for a promotion sometime soon, and West was on the short list of candidates to succeed her. That would give him a chance to make his racist philosophies and practices SOP at all Seattle Knight Errant precincts, a possibility that the anonymous Mr. Johnson was willing to pay top nuyen to ensure never happened.

Truthfully, that was Ase's primary motivation for taking this job—the money. She had a feeling that, as a troll, she ought to have a more personal interest in the matter, but she didn't. Nor did she hold to any of that high-and-mighty, "Kill one, save a thousand" bulldrek that some assassins bought into. She was just a professional doing a job that promised her enough

BY CHRIS MASTEY

cred to live comfortably for another few months. She had her share of metahuman friends who were more politically minded spamming her inbox with forwarded rants about how The Man was trampling on their rights. She deleted them on sight.

She toggled through the various camera feeds with her usual stoicism, waiting for West to make his regular post-shift trip to Reno's, his favorite Downtown Seattle bar.

It didn't take Ase long to find the target. West was right on time, walking toward Reno's with two of his usual drinking buddies from the Renton precinct. Everyone knew the back rooms of Reno's hosted some good shadow activities—West and his jackass pals probably got off on feeling like they were staring down the mouth of evil criminals and intimdating them into lawfulness by their mere presence. When in truth, any runners working in the place knew damn well how to do their business without some drek-brained off-duty cop interfering with them.

"Target sighted approaching from the south," Ase radioed to her teammates. "ETA three minutes. Everyone remember their roles?"

Every team member signaled in the affirmative.

"Good. Now everyone remember: stick to the plan. I don't care what your personal feelings are about this guy. Right now, he's just a walking paycheck, one that we won't get to cash if we frag this up. Radio silence from here on out unless something goes bad. Ase out."

With that, Ase turned her attention back to the camera, watching intently as the target walked towards his demise.

x

Even lost as he was in the song he was singing, Nye couldn't help but smile at Ase's admonition.

No problem in my case, the elf thought. *I* have *no personal feelings about this.*

Well, that wasn't entirely true. He *did* feel a bit ridiculous in the shabby winter clothes he was wearing to disguise himself as a street singer performing a few storefronts down from Reno's. Still, it was his role in the job, and he was getting paid well to do it.

Plus, if he was honest, Nye had to admit that pulling people's strings was just plain *fun* to him. He took pride in the fact that he could control someone with just a few choice words, without that person even knowing they were being played. Frag mages and their mind control spells—he, a total mundane, had been bullshitting people and making them dance like marionettes since high school. Granted, shadowrunning had forced him to up his game considerably, but he didn't mind. He loved the challenge.

And looking to the south, Nye could see his latest challenge heading his way—Captain West and his two drinking buddies.

He wasn't ready to spring the trap just yet, though. He had to act natural until they came close enough so he'd have the element of surprise. And so he kept on singing, nodding in mock thanks to the passersby that stopped for a few seconds to take in his performance. A few even made quick virtual deposits into the ARO hat he had sitting in front of him, giving him a few extra nuyen of spending money. *Damn, I'm good*, he thought.

Nye stole a glance at the officers. About thirty meters away.

Almost there ... he thought as he finished his current song, making a show of catching his breath to fill the gap between the end of the song and the officers' arrival.

Just as Nye finished adjusting his stocking cap to make sure it covered his pointed ears, West and his pals passed within spitting distance.

Showtime.

Step one: Get them to pay attention to him. A *good* kind of attention—it wouldn't do the mission much good if they just punched him in the face and left him bleeding on the street. Nye knew from experience with cops that an appeal to their ego was usually the best way to go about that.

"Hey, it's the heroes of the streets!" Nye exclaimed as West and his entourage passed in front of him. "The fearless warriors in black, on the attack!"

West turned his head towards Nye, and for a brief, tense second, the elf saw a familiar look in the officer's eye. A look that said the cop was sizing him up, trying to determine whether or not this was a trick of some kind.

A second later, the look disappeared and a smile crossed West's face.

"Hey there!" the cop said as he extended his hand. "Always nice to meet a fan."

Mistake number one: Letting your guard down, Nye thought as he shook West's hand.

Step two: Rope them into being an audience.

"Hey, your guys' work has protected my broke hoop more times than I can count," Nye said with just enough friendliness to sound genuine without sounding like a suck-up. "You on patrol right now?"

"Nah, we're just heading out to get an after-shift drink," West replied.

"Sounds like fun," Nye said. "You guys got time for a special performance in your honor?"

West and his drinking buddies exchanged glances, each of them nodding.

"Why the heck not?" West said. "What're you gonna sing for us?"

Your funeral dirge, Nye thought as he ran through his mental playlist for a good tune.

Step three: Spring the trap.

"All right, I've got a good one," Nye said as he started his song.

Before he even finished the first verse, Nye knew he had these cops in the palm of his hand. He just hoped that the rest of the team stuck to the plan.

x

Frag the plan. Kill 'em all.

The thought had crossed Hammerhands' mind at least a dozen times since he'd taken his position in the dark alley across the street from Reno's. And as the three pawns got roped in by Nye's fanboy act, it only intruded more frequently and insistently.

To hell with the plan. You could kill all three of them in as many seconds, easy.

Hammerhands' role in the mission was to strike at West's two drinking buddies from behind once they were sufficiently distracted by Nye's ego-stroking performance. Not to kill, though—he was only supposed to incapacitate them, depriving West of support (and human shields) when the team's sniper fired the fatal shot.

That nagging thought tempted him more and more as the moment of truth grew near, though. This mission was more than just a paycheck for him; it was personal. He was a human, but he'd watched his kid brother goblinize into an ork at the age of thirteen and helped him through the post-change trauma.

And then, years later, he'd been forced to watch helplessly as that brother lay in a coma for six months thanks to some drekhead Humanis assholes who thought being an ork walking through Renton was a crime punishable by a near-fatal beating. He'd been forced to endure the Lone Star detective's condescending bullshit ("Maybe he shouldn't have been walking through Renton in the first place") and the half-assed investigation that never resulted in any justice for his brother.

Do it for your brother. Three quick slices across their throats is all it would take.

The sound of Nye beginning his distraction song snapped Hammerhands out of his revenge-fueled daydreams and back to reality. It would soon be time for him to strike, but not yet. He had to wait for them to become entranced by Nye's performance.

When you strike, strike to kill.

The adept's hands clenched into fists as he watched the three bastards and felt his anger grow. Not quite ready yet ...

You've got your knife on your belt. One quick draw, three slashes, and it'd all be over.

Hammerhands saw the three cops nodding their heads to the beat of the song.

It was just the sign he was waiting for.

Now!

Hammerhands dashed from the dark alley towards the cops, covering the distance between them in what seemed like an instant, the sound of his footsteps completely masked by his adept abilities.

Kill those sons of bitches!

The thought intruded into Hammerhands' mind one final time as he prepared to deliver the first blow. There was no doubt in his mind that he would be fast enough to pull it off.

He pulled his right hand back to his waist as he started the stride that would bring the first cop within striking distance.

His foot came down, striking the pavement but making no sound, his target blissfully unaware of his presence even as he closed to melee range ...

And he thrust his right arm forward with a closed fist, striking the cop in just the right nerve cluster to render him unconscious. The black-uniformed pawn dropped to the pavement like a rag doll.

Before West and his other buddy could register their friend's peril, Hammerhands executed a spin move to his left that ended with a side kick to the same nerve cluster on his other target, knocking him out as well.

Hammerhands allowed himself a slight smile and a brief moment of *schadenfreude* at the look of horror beginning to form on West's face as he finally registered his friends' conditions. It was only a moment, though–before West could turn around and face his friends' attacker, Hammerhands sprinted into the concealing shadows of another dark alley.

As he ran, part of his mind chastised him for sparing the two cops.

They were just as bad as West! They should die before anyone else suffers at their hands!

Hammerhands couldn't argue with that. But he also knew that, even as fast and as skilled as he was, there was a chance something could have gone wrong if he'd ad-libbed. And if something had gone wrong, the rest of the team would've needed to adjust their tactics on the fly. That would have taken time, and even a few extra seconds could have allowed West and his flunkies to recover from the shock and shoot the whole thing to hell.

He never would have forgiven himself if he'd fragged the plan up and let that bastard West get away. For now, West's death would have to be enough.

All he could do now was hope that Third Eye and Wrath came through.

×

Third Eye felt like a god.

Maybe it was unprofessional and egotistical of her, but she couldn't help herself. Cloaked by her sister Wrath's invisibility spell, looking through the scope of a sniper rifle, preparing to put a bullet through the head of a racist cop and save potentially thousands of lives in the process, it was tough for Third Eye not to feel like a vengeful god waiting to smite the demon in human flesh named Daniel West.

Captain West. Another racist making metahumans' lives hell. As an ork, Third Eye was no stranger to scum like that. She'd met a bunch of them in her 23 years, and so had her meta family members and friends. Whether they were authority abusers like West or just random racist morons, they all believed that the only good meta was a dead meta.

They all deserved what Third Eye was waiting to give West: justice, in the form of a bullet to the head.

Third Eye and her sister, also an ork, were holed up in a private office in the high-rise office building across the street from Reno's. Getting in hadn't been a problem—Third Eye's talent for hacking electronic locks hadn't failed her in the moment of truth, and Ase's Matrix support kept them hidden from the street cameras. Wrath's invisibility spells had done the rest, hiding the two sisters from the building's cameras and the eyes of the building's few after-hours workers as they made their way to their vantage point.

Since then it had been a waiting game, with Third Eye's crosshairs never leaving West's head once he showed up. Now, Hammerhands just needed to make his move.

Let's go, Hammerhands! How much longer must justice wait?

No sooner did the thought enter Third Eye's mind than a blurry figure entered the corner of her vision, rushing toward one of West's racist buddies.

Finally.

In a literal blink of an eye, the cop on West's right was unconscious on the pavement and Hammerhands was moving on to the other one, his movements too fast for Third Eye to follow. She blinked again, and by the time she opened her eye, both cops were unconscious. Hammerhands was nowhere to be seen.

Third Eye, you're clear to fire.

In the moment before she squeezed the trigger, Third Eye felt a rush of pure emotional energy, the feeling of divine righteousness waxing ever greater in her mind, body, and soul.

Third Eye savored the feeling even as her eye remained focused on West's head.

This one's for all my friends who've suffered because of people like you, West.

With the tightening of her right index finger, Third Eye let her 7.62 millimeter divine bolt of justice fly.

Less than a second later, as though it were homing in on West's demonic soul, the bolt found its mark, splattering across the sidewalk the brain that had taken pleasure in the deaths of so many innocents.

Third Eye smiled as she stood up for the first time in an hour, barely noticing the aching in her legs as she savored her team's triumph.

Ase's voice coming through her earpiece radio jolted Third Eye out of her internal celebration.

"Mission completed, team," Ase said. "Time to bail. Meet at the designated rendezvous point. Ase out."

Third Eye nodded as she collected the single spent shell casing and slung her rifle. As she started for the door, she saw Wrath open her eyes.

"My spells say the coast is clear," Wrath said. "Let's get the hell out of here."

The smile never left Third Eye's face as the two sisters made their way out of the building. Not many jobs brought her this kind of satisfaction, the kind unrelated to the pile of cred that was coming her way. Someone once said, "All that's necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." Tonight, Third Eye and her comrades *did* something. They struck a blow for justice by thwarting an evil man's rise to power, saving thousands of metahuman lives and avenging those already stolen.

For Third Eye, that was a reward greater than nuyen.

DESPERATE TIMES

As the door of the ultra-sleek Rolls-Royce Phaeton limousine whispered itself shut, Riser looked across the faintly lit expanse of the back of the expensive extraction tool. He watched as the young man in the ill-fitting Armani suit crawled over and curled into a comfortable corner. There was a moment of nostalgia, or at least recalled memory, for Riser as he saw his former self in the man. Not just the Riser he was before CFD, but the young Riser that had grown up on the streets. Those days when runs involved being a poser in an ill-fitting suit hoping that no one noticed he was just a ganger in a costume.

The kid reminded him of his former self in other ways too. He was shrewd, street smart, angrier than he had a right to be, and willing to take a chance and put it all on the line to try and get ahead. This last part was actually why Riser had picked him for this job in the first place. The kid was a solid decker with decent equipment, but it was his willingness to take risks that got him the call.

During the initial meet, Riser laid it all out. He made sure the kid knew it was a simple overwatch gig with some basic Matrix assistance. Nothing exciting. Nothing strenuous. And it played out like it was sold. The kid went in ahead, got the necessary access, and then just waited and watched Riser, a consummate professional, pull off a smooth B&E without a single moment of tension. At least that was the story he was sharing in the back of the limousine. Riser knew, not in the "it's a certain fact" way but in the "I know why I hired you" way, that it wasn't true.

"Did you read the files yet," Riser interjected in the middle of the third rendition of the kid's "Nope, I didn't do anything else while I was in there."

"What?" the kid said, with not quite enough confusion in his tone.

"The ones you skimmed. Have you read those files yet?" Riser's matter-of-fact tone and direct stare were enough to express just how bad of an idea it would be to continue the innocent schoolboy routine.

"Not yet. Got a few security features I'm going to need to work my way past."

"What kind of features?"

"Data bombs, blinker programs, some black IC—nasty brain-fryer stuff. I'm going to need a few hours."

Riser couldn't help but smile. He could also read the kid's body language and knew the kid took the look as a good sign. Inexperienced. Just how Riser liked them. He tensed his forearm muscle and twisted his wrist slightly to release the manual catch for his wrist holster that pushed the small Ares pistol into his waiting fingers. The smartlink came instantly online, and Riser got the last of the confirmations he needed. He squeezed the trigger while the smartlink system told him the gun was aimed at the kid's left arm. A little wing clip as a warning.

The small-caliber slug slammed hard into the trauma plate built into the kid's armored vest. The shot knocked the wind out of him. Though stunned, the kid still managed to reach for his own pistol, but Riser was already across the space and planting a foot on the kid's forearm as it crossed his chest, reaching for the shoulder rig. The impact of Riser's foot on his chest, softened by the forearm, was enough to get the point across.

"Clear the security features and transfer the data to my 'link. Then scrub your copy." Riser's voice was even and calm.

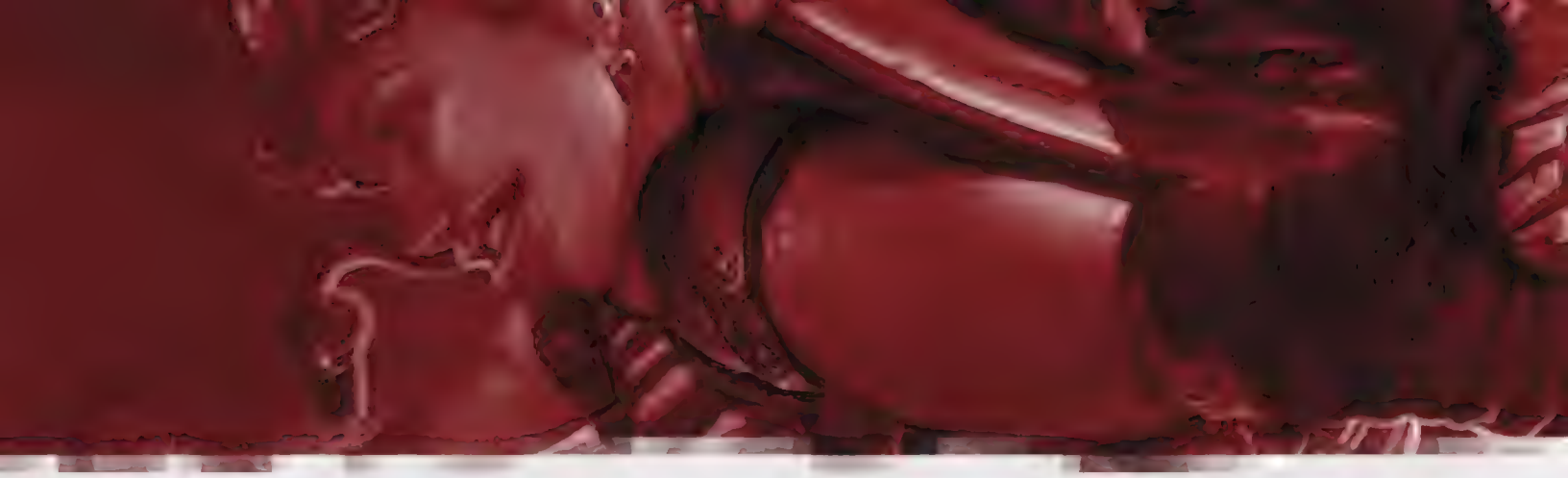
The kid took a good thirty seconds to finally get his breath. When he finally spoke, he demonstrated his continued lack of experience.

"I need time," the kid tried to lie.

"Clear the data bomb or I'll put the next one through your deck," Riser said calmly, but emphasized the point by shaking the pistol in his hand slightly.

"Ha. My deck's cranial," the kid said defiantly.

"I know." Riser straightened his arm and placed the broad cylindrical end of the pistol's silencer against the kid's forehead. "And regardless of the virus you dropped into my smartlink, I'm sure to hit my target from here."



ON THE LINE

It's interesting to watch the world through the scope of a high-powered rifle. You see only a narrow field, but you see it in such great detail. You take in so much more without the distractions. And the crosshairs are an ever-present reminder of the limitations of life, the imminent and unknown doom that could be around any corner, and, most of all, the power I hold over all I survey.

I call myself Riser, because that's what everyone else calls me, but it's not who I am. Don't get me wrong, there's still a lot of Riser in me—he was a remarkable example of humanity that I was not willing to erase from existence—but I am so much more. As such, I've gathered the following over the past several months in order to rekindle a relationship that was lost when I joined with Riser and first became involved with JackPoint.

- Riser? *The* Riser? And "a remarkable example of humanity"? Can't be the same hoophole we knew. Is this for real?
- Sticks

- Read on. It's valuable, regardless of the source.
- Glitch

I am not here to beg forgiveness for the sins of Riser during our initial integration, but instead to offer a view of what I can offer this gathering of shadow-knowledge. I was impressed very early on with one of the ideals of JackPoint—that it doesn't matter who you are, it only matters that you bring value to the site. While I understand everyone began to panic over the presence of head cases in your midst, especially with one of them being Fastjack himself, I also appreciate that Plan 9 has been granted access again because it offers a valuable insight into so many areas no one else dares to speak of.

With that as my greatest consideration, I offer up this piece. It is a view of some of the shadows' largest issues through the brutal reality of the assassin's eye. Death is often the only solution for the problems arising. The megacorporations, governments, and even simple denizens of the streets must face issues that can only be dealt with in one way, the hard path of wetwork. With that thought in mind I present to you, 2077: Through the Scope.

CFD

I'll start where I started, with Cognitive Fragmentation Disorder. This has been one of the most thorough cover-ups the megacorporations have ever done. Intermixed within their new Matrix cooperation was the initial foundation for their cooperation in Boston and the coordinated efforts we have seen since trying to keep the masses in the dark. This coordination extends only so far as the public moral compass of those involved will bend. Beyond that is where I, and others without the hindrance of moral qualms and in possession of certain skills, come in to execute plans best left from the sight of even other members of that narrow group of conspirators. From here I've watched the threat of CFD unfold.

The terror of CFD should have reached epic proportions and exploded with the events of Boston, but the coalition between the megacorporations and the Corporate Court made it impossible for the world to know. A fabricated encephalitis virus later, and Boston is a cash cow of donations for research and aid. The CC is playing coordinator for the efforts there, but all the individual megas are making their own moves around the world related to CFD. I should know, I've taken several of the contracts on names we all know and loved. You've heard they were gone. Public spectacles were made of their funerary services while backroom deals started the minute they were gone in order to fill the power vacuums and make sure their deaths best served corporate interests. The work cascades from there. A power vacuum as big as these people left sucks the life out of plenty of their would-be successors. Special thanks goes out to the various runner teams I used to help with several of these.

- Before I read on, can someone please tell me that whatever drek this head case is spewing has been vetted before you popped it up over here?
- 2XL

- No. It hasn't. Because that isn't the job. We deliver the data. You sift through and pull the nuggets of gold out from the wash. You don't want to read further do to that, your loss. If it makes you feel any better, there'll be some payoff at the end.
- Glitch

- Geez, Glitch. Wake up on the wrong side of the deck?
- 2XL

CONFIRMED KILLS

First up, a quick look at several individuals who are no longer with us and what their deaths might mean to the world at large. These are the confirmed kills, because I confirmed them. Some I pulled the trigger myself, others I worked with a team but saw the final result. Unless CFD gives a head case the ability to resurrect from the dead, these folks are gone.

GEORGINA HAMPTON, GAVILAN VENTURES: CONFIRMED HEAD CASE

Hampton was an easy mark. Gavilan may be a major stockholder in Ares, but Hampton's security was obviously not on the top of their priority list. Maybe someone higher up knew she was a head case and just made sure she had the laziest and most undisciplined private protection detail, but getting in rifle range of her Austin ranch and making sure the place was burned to the ground with a runner team was far easier than the payday would indicate. The contract came through discreet channels, but I've made sure to evaluate all such channels lately due to my own "greatly desired" status. This, and almost every other hit on this list, came through the Coalition, a known contracting agency for the Corporate Court.

Hampton's death has been yet another blow to the shaky infrastructure of Ares. This move did not shake the heavens, but it has opened the floodgates for other pieces of the Gavilan team to jockey for her position of control at the Ares stockholder firm. The chaos has delayed several votes since Hampton was terminated, as well as whatever she was working on in her little head case brain. Watch Gavilan for job opportunities from within as well as freelance chances with fallout from Hampton's private efforts.

- Gavilan is getting looked at hard during the Corporate Court audit. As a shareholder in Ares, it would seem they'd avoid the attraction of the auditors who are supposedly focusing on the lesser megacorps. The truth might be a front to make it all look fair. Or perhaps Gavilan is doing something Ares' other dominant forces don't like and is getting a little reminder of their place in the world.
- Mr. Bonds

KATRINA THYSSEN, ZETA-IMPCHEM: CONFIRMED HEAD CASE

Thyssen's status as a head case wasn't surprising. Her work on a cure/solution for the problem was genuine, though, and thus it confuses me as to why someone wanted her gone. That didn't stop the job from getting done, but it created a lot more questions than answers. Z-IC moved up the target list for data on CFD after Thyssen was gone, and some speculate that she was stifling the work being done, and the work is now pushing ahead without her. I got a peek at her work, and she very clearly was pushing the envelope. If others in the company are branching out on whatever she was doing, they may get somewhere, but if they are all just trying to copy the work she already did, it will be a while before anything useful comes of it.

When I looked into who set up the original contract, I was stalled at every turn. Whoever it was covered their tracks well and paid off the right people to keep it quiet.

- Z-IC is one of the main supporters of the Megacorporate Audit. They're looking for partners or potential purchases among the other megacorps. Thyssen was opposed to the whole thing, so maybe the hit on her had less to do with CFD and more to do with the Revision. If someone could ID the contractor, they could likely shed some light on that.
- Mr. Bonds

AVERY SHORK, UCAS POLITICIAN: CONFIRMED HEAD CASE

Shork was a tough nut to crack because he had surrounded himself with others of our kind. After leaving office he slipped into obscurity but continued to reach out to contacts within the UCAS government to influence the politics of the nation. When the UCAS decided to pull back some of their support from the Boston quarantine it was Avery who pushed the right buttons to get the decision turned around. For head cases on the outside, Boston is an apocalyptic endgame. If the world really finds out what happened inside, they'll quickly suspect that this event did not begin or end with Boston. Then we'll see the witch hunt begin. The announcement that Shork drowned after the boom of his sailboat came loose from a snapped line and knocked him unconscious and overboard worked great for the public, but his new friends and followers know better. The lack of a body has made many of those folks think he is not gone and is instead swimming back to them or waiting to be found after foul play sent him off to sea. His body is now just another part of the Atlantic food chain and his head is a fine mist created by a half kilo block of high grade commercial explosives.

- Can CFD infect sea life?
- Glitch

- Do you ever stop trying to give me nightmares?
- Slamm-0!

The future of Shork's followers is unknown. Without a contract I'm not interested in cleaning house, but their New Brunswick compound is straight out of an episode of "Cults Revealed: Truth in Truthsayers." Independent operators looking to cash in on some of those open offers from megas interested in CFD-infected subjects could consider this place a gold mine. Others more interested in cleansing the world of the CFD virus could consider it a good start or a solid notch in the belt. Head cases looking for a place to be with their own kind can consider this place a haven where they can learn about what they are.

- That's a different Riser. I see the value in points one and two, farm 'em or fry 'em, but why mention it as a place to go? Obviously that's the head case side of him talking and looking to support his kind.
- Kane

- Or the old Riser looking to draw more flies to the trap.
- /dev/grrl

KLAUS ALBERSTADT, CEO, KRUPP MUNITIONS (SAEDER-KRUPP SUBSIDIARY): CONFIRMED HEAD CASE

Klaus was an interesting operation. I watched him for weeks as he went about a normal life. As he was the CEO of a major S-K subsidiary, I wasn't privy to any documents he was tampering with, funds he was moving on the sly, or hiring he was influencing. All I could watch was his physical activities. That's a problem for a solo operative who lacks skills in certain aspects of the shadows and doesn't trust anyone to work by their side. It's a big reason I want back onto JP. Even though we've always had our differences, I at least know I can trust the JP crew when the chips are down. Back to the point.

- Trust us? We never trusted him and he never trusted us.
- /dev/grrl

- Fastjack trusted him enough for that Albuquerque job. It may have lead down a very dark rabbit hole, but it proves this thing's point.
- Stone

I was on the verge of writing off the head case contract when I finally spotted something strange. He was out for a drink with a few colleagues. That would have been quite strange, but he had created a small contest between personnel from six of the Essen offices. The winners got dinner and drinks with the boss and a 2,500 nuyen bonus. The winners seemed staged, as six of the ten were from the same manufacturing plant, while the other four were each from separate offices that were all related to financial affairs. My first thought was an attempt at infecting a group all at once but he didn't do anything that could pass the virus on until late in the evening, and it wasn't directly aimed at the others.

Alberstadt downed nearly a score of drinks and was assisted to his car by a few sycophantic underlings. At the car he bent over and started vomiting. The splatter was getting all over the others shoes, and I picked up his ruse. He had pulled out the easiest to manipulate from the group he had already selected and was spreading the infected nanites onto their clothes. Luckily, that day's immediate option, what I call my contingencies for hits that need to go down right away, was a car bomb. A mental click later and Alberstadt and four future head case cronies were disposed of in a fiery explosion.

I can't guarantee he didn't slip something into the drinks or food of the other six "winners," but I know I stopped him from starting something with those four. As I'll point out often, it's a place for others to look. The six others can be identified here [link]. My contract stopped at Alberstadt.

- That's the Riser we know. Unless there's money in killing, he's not interested. I'm certainly leaning toward accepting him back if it gets put up to a vote. Keep your enemies closer and all that. Plus, it's entertaining. I come here for a good laugh as often as I do for intel. Probably more.
- Kane

ANATOLY KIRILENKO, CEO, EVO: HEAD CASE STATUS: UNCONFIRMED

I watched Kirilenko and never found a hole in his security wide enough to use on my own. I could have dropped him with a bullet from a kilometer out, but even if I did he had the kind of security that would snag even that kind of shooter. With no prospect for a clean shot, I simply watched and waited. The payoff was worth a long wait, and my monetary status has been stable for a good long while, so I could afford the time.

Physically, Kirilenko kept a low profile. He attended minimal meetings and did most of his work from the road or the air. He met with contacts via the Matrix and even spent some time up on Evo's orbital station. I couldn't follow but I caught back up on the ground after. The break from surveillance gave me time to set up a job with some up and comers in our world. I spread around a decent chunk and bought myself the right tools for the job. Kirilenko didn't make it another month dirtside; the team I hired is in the wind with a decent payout, and I'm a good chunk richer for claiming the contract. It pays to be in with the pros.

This job has had some serious consequences. For the megacorp, it left a void high up in Evo that has everyone making moves to approach the top seat; for the crime syndicates it severed the strongest Vory connection Evo had to their hometown, Vladivostok; and for the streets

it boiled some bad blood that was already bubbling between Evo and their less-progressive rivals, leading to jobs galore across the globe.

- Those up-and-comers are now two short of their original crew of five. Someone's coming down on them hard.
- Icarus

- Not what I heard. One of those guys OD'd on novacoke after the big score, and the second went down in a running gun battle with Lone Star in Austin.
- Stone

While Kirilenko wasn't confirmed as a head case, I can confirm that his megacorporation is full of them. Evo has seen an ever-increasing population of head cases since the discovery of the virus back in '75. The difference here is that the EvoCulture philosophy has accepted the head cases, the CFD virus, and the entire process as just another step or aspect of the "more than metahuman" condition. The virus and condition aren't discussed openly as such, but the Evo family has been discussing "cognitive transference" extensively over the last year. Most of the research and data has been coming out of Gagarin, but contracts on spacers are hard to collect.

- This makes a lot of sense with what we now see from the Monads. Strange to call them that—they're really just head cases.
- Slamm-0!

- They're hard to collect, but they're getting more and more common. I've seen at least a dozen come across info sites I visit. The work is all pure wet. Most of the CFD jobs I've seen are split, dead or alive, with extra cash for the living.
- Balladeer

MILES LANIER, FORMER COMPANY MAN; HEAD CASE STATUS: CONFIRMED

Don't get excited, he's not dead. While I was exiled for my infection, the keys to the kingdom seemed to have been handed over to Mr. Lanier. His former position,

CFD status, and current activities are all factors for the various contracts currently active on the former corporate shark. I haven't personally gone after the man, but I always have my ears open to new information on any big names. Lanier's activities have fallen into three distinct areas; searching for the source of CFD, searching for the cure for CFD, and playing the corporate game to maintain or increase the value of his stock portfolio in order to fund the previously mentioned endeavors.

His search for the source is his Achilles heel. He has become more and more desperate to gain control of definitive and substantial evidence. That means he's taking greater and greater risks to get anything the megacorps haven't already corrupted. That isn't to say that he'll walk right into a trap poorly laid by a no-talent collateral crusher like that "accident" in Atlanta, but he can be led through a careful and Machiavellian plot laid out by a true artiste of death. Most of the hitters who have used the search for the cure as his weakness have paid the ultimate price.

Lanier knows about as much about this virus as anyone else on the planet, and he knows there isn't going to suddenly be some simple cure that appears one day. With the cover from the megacorps that this virus has had from the start, the cure is far more likely to be host eradication than viral elimination. The uptick in contracts with a dead-or-alive clause for known head cases should be the prime indicator that their experimentation isn't going well.

The last place you'll see Lanier's touch is playing the age-old game of market manipulation. He still has a healthy stock portfolio with the full range of megacorporate ratings. He tends to run his corporate parlor tricks on the AA and smaller corps but he'll occasionally pull a move or two against the Big Ten in order to send some ripples out into the pond. His latest big play was splitting stock between the Villiers' family: Samantha, Martin, and Cara. Events since have consolidated control of all that stock into the youthful hands of Cara. The loss of Martin behind the Boston quarantine and the sudden death of Samantha left Cara in control of a total of eleven percent of NeoNET. Only half of what her father controls, but putting a solid third of the company in the hands of the Villiers family. If daddy and daughter can play nice, they could take NeoNET in any direction they want.

- Samantha Villiers death was a contracted hit. The source of the contract is a topic of much interest. A lot of people had a reason to want Samantha dead, but only one person really benefitted from it. Problem is, prior to the will being read, Cara wasn't on the best of terms with her mother and couldn't have been expecting much more than a house or a few cars to be left to her.
- Balladeer

- How did she get Martin's part of Lanier's sell-off?
- Bull

- That's why suspicion is still on her. When the quarantine went into effect, Martin's shares needed a voice. No one on the board was willing to give more power to Richard or Samantha, so the vote went to his niece. Cara gained voting rights over the two percent Martin had bought from Miles. The event shook out some other info, and it was revealed that she already had one percent she got from Uncle Miles to give her three percent. It wasn't earth shattering at the time, since that family has long been full of disagreements, but now it leaves only two people who have to get along. Rumor always had Cara as daddy's little girl—and daddy was a dick.
- Icarus

Discussions on CFD infectees could go on forever if I keep delivering individual files. I have a vast collection of data on known and suspected head cases we can share in the future, but for now I'll move onto my next major area of interest in relation to CFD: Boston.

LOOKING AT A LOCKDOWN

Thanks to the corporate powers that be, the world has been kept mostly in the dark about the quarantine of Boston for over a year now. First off, let me just state how overwhelmingly uncomfortable that makes me feel. We in the shadows know exactly what caused this thanks to the efforts of D.C. and A.J., but the words of that pair of Boston martyrs haven't gotten much further than JackPoint, and the fact that the file still exists on JP at all is thanks to the host's members and the fear everyone in the world, including GOD, has of hacking into an archive. The rest of the "free" world still thinks this was the result of a terrorist attack and a viral encephalitis epidemic that is still highly contagious. In short, after almost a year of coordinated efforts to redesign the Matrix, the megacorporations continued their cooperation for another year to keep the world from knowing that Boston is a town filled with head cases that just might remain in quarantine until the next Ice Age.

While Boston is likely to stay in lockdown for all eternity, the cooperation between the megacorporations is already straining. When it cracks, it's going to be titanic. By the amount of work and money in the shadows that's revolving around CFD-related info, especially about the source, you can guarantee it will be a game of Pin-the-Blame-on-the-Mega once they have the right proof against the right corp. Don't bet on whether the blame will be accurate. When the finger gets pointed, it will be the corp that draws the short straw who gets targeted, and it won't be pretty. None of the megacorporations are run by individuals who go down without a fight.

While watching things about CFD and keeping an eye on Boston, my scope has fallen on numerous plots by both individuals and groups to bring down or break the

quarantine around Boston, even without a cure. Whether the efforts are fueled by love, greed, power, or blind idiocy, they've all pushed money into the shadows.

Relatives looking to get their loved ones out are the most numerous and least dangerous. They don't usually make offers large enough to incline anyone of skill to take the job, and the low-paid hacks who prey on these bleeding hearts either steal the money and bail, die trying to get in, or disappear behind the lockdown. Rich relatives have occasionally laid out enough nuyen to hire better teams but even I, with all my years of experience in the shadows, have not found a reliable route through that quarantine. Getting in is hard enough, but getting out is a death sentence.

Next come the corps and the greed motivator. Not many people would think of a quarantine as a place to make money, but where there's a resource, there's a way. Sadly, most of the money being made off of Boston's situation is very dirty. Even though pulling the trigger is rarely a problem for most of us, the rest of the world tends to be far more squeamish. Often even contracting a true hit is too much for the conscience of the average person. In order to keep their hands free of the bloody stains of guilt, the bulk of the world sends people to places where other people will take care of extinguishing their life. The NEMAQZ has become a common dumping ground for people that fall into those categories. Corporate drones who have seen too much or asked the wrong questions are being snagged from their corporate housing, stuffed into the supply drop crates and dropped into Boston. I imagine many don't survive the trip, but those who do enter into the rather unique form of hell that awaits them inside.

Greed also has runners taking jobs to look for a way in and out by probing the defenses, digging up blackmail on the guards, and trying to find areas of weakness between the megacorporate forces sharing certain roles that can be exploited. Efforts against the defenses prove to be fruitless, deadly, or easily overcome, leaving the team on the wrong side of the quarantine and suddenly facing a much stronger opposing force. All of the blackmail efforts have created a rather unique atmosphere with the guards and officers stationed on the walls. As their corporate masters have no desire for them to flip and decide to let some poor sod out because they happen to have a picture of the guard with their wick in a sheep's hoop, the corps openly promote honesty among the men in their interesting activities. This has led to a large force of guards and officers who have volunteered to work the quarantine because it allows them to perform whatever debauched acts they desire without fear of losing their jobs or even personal repercussions. What can the sheep fragger say about the guy who likes to dress up as a baby with a pacifier in his hoop? Not much.

Power is the worst motivator in the known universe because it is so intangible you can't ever be sure what will give it to you or how you will be able to hold onto it. That does not prevent people from attempting to exploit the plight of several million people in order to better their position of power. Megacorporate executives, government officials and flunkies, as well as celebrities and fame-seekers, have been abusing the lockdown from the minute it arose. Pulling at the heartstrings, making accusations of fraud or undue violence, and claiming that the cure is on the inside but the powers-that-be are too timid to reach in and get it, have all been the opening lines for Johnsons looking to increase their boss's control of the world. They write the notes, and we play the song.

Blind idiocy is the last and most dangerous of the threats against the security of the quarantine. Individuals and groups that somehow think that the mores and doctrines of their group are more valuable than the safety of billions make every day watching the wall a test of patience. The outside of the wall has been tested by the New Revolution, Warpath, TerraFirst!, Alamos 20K, the Green Brigade, Youth on Fire, Angels of Ascension, the Children of the Dragon, the Ancients, and the NEMAtoads, just to mention a few. They come at the wall in force and die, or get driven off, in droves. They post their insane reasoning on the Matrix and think that if they somehow believe in their cause and the wrongness of the quarantine, they will break through and free the people of Boston. They are killed and captured, but each group seems to fuel the fires of the next with their desperate struggles. If one ever does break through, the result is going to be very ugly. Since these groups are often loud, even before they go after the wall, contracts go out on high-ranking members, organizers, or even the occasional plebeian to make a point. I've tracked several of the contracts back and found interesting fingerprints of both megacorporate intelligence divisions and UCAS governmental divisions that are usually identified by only letters.

I'm certain that when it comes time for the key to be turned on the lockdown, the shadows are going to explode with work. Before the quarantine is lifted the work will focus on trying to set up good position for the fallout, and in the immediate aftermath there will be work to attempt to solve a million missing persons cases, and then over the course of the next few years things will shift to trying to keep the lie intact long enough for the world to stop caring about digging for the truth.

Even though my scope has been focused on Earth, the information that I have reviewed is not always so terrestrial. While most think Boston will be the spot where the world finally gets introduced to CFD, I would suggest we look to the stars. Or more precisely the next planet over. Though everyone here suspected it, I've uncovered verified data that the Gagarin base on Mars is entirely populated by head cases, who are referring to themselves as Monads. They've been communicating quietly with Evo for a while, but lately the relationship has become more terse.

EVO ANNOUNCES DEEP-SPACE MISSION, DECEMBER 31, 2078

The EVOlution continues as Evo's Roskosmos subsidiary announces plans to launch the world's first manned deep-space mission. The launch date is set for December 31, 2077 at 2300 Vladivostok local time and is set to be the pinnacle event of the New Year's celebration there. As this is a momentous occasion for the entire Earth, this reporter is sure citizens all around the planet, from every nation and megacorporation, will be tuned in.

The vessel, currently only referred to as Deep Space Exploration and Colonization I (DSECI), will be officially named at the moment of launch, and it will be crewed by 3,000 brave explorers. The full complement of the crew has not been released yet and may not be fully revealed until after launch in order to protect the security of those taking on this one-way endeavor. While the entire project is fully funded by Evo, rumors have begun to fly from other megacorporations looking to buy spots on the vessel for their own staff.

Alongside the revelation of this world-changing endeavor, Evo also released a statement through the Corporate Court that a possible security leak about this highly confidential program was the reason for the Gagarin station blackout back in 2072. Since then, all communications and information about the project have been kept under the tightest security. A project like this does not spring up overnight, and the severity of the informational security protocols they put in place shows the value of this project to Evo.

- I remember seeing this back when and thinking it was Evo's solution to CFD? Load all the head cases onto a ship and launch them out into the ether?
- Kane

- From what we "know," Gagarin is entirely full of head cases, or Monads as they want to be called. Anyone who has gone to Gagarin would now be a Monad. This operation is being entirely run by the Monads. Riser just posted more on Kirilenko, who has strong ties to Roskosmos, as a possible head case. If there was any human element to the project, word would have leaked. Research into deep space exploration and travel has not had a significant budget with any of the corporations since the turn of the century because of the lack of profit involved. All of this to me looks more like a way to get away from humanity as opposed to a way for humanity to send them away.
- Netcat

- This project only came into existence in the past three years, and the only reason it was being announced in July, instead of never, was because someone was about to leak information on it. This was Evo getting ahead of the leak, except it looks like the rumored leak was really the Monad announcement.
- Plan 9

- This could have been, quite possibly, a clever call to other head cases who wanted in on the project and off Earth. This announcement gives folks heading for Mars plenty of time to get there by the launch, but it keeps the window narrow for security forces trying to prevent attempts to get to Gagarin to sabotage the vessel. There will be work up that way in the near future.
- Orbital DK

- Unless you're Ares and just go after them from Charon.
- Sticks

- How has Ares not noticed this DSECI being built? This can't be a small ship. The resources being brought alone should have made them suspicious.
- Netcat

- What resources? Everything Evo needs is right there on Mars.
- Orbital DK

- At least we can corroborate this, since they already came out. He must have gathered this before. Good to see we weren't all taken by surprise.
- Ma'fan

While Evo, the very open-minded megacorporation, is communicating with Gagarin and the Monads, Ares is orbiting the red planet in the Charon station glaring down their celestial scope with a multi-megaton sniper rifle aimed at the Martian base. It's a megacorporate war just waiting to start. Or an Omega order just waiting to be executed. Or a ploy meant to hide another host of head cases. Or a Machiavellian megacorporate machination that even my genius intellect cannot decipher. It's distant trouble, but jobs are still being contracted on individuals on- and off-world related to this situation. While there are no runners or even runner teams (not even Assets, Inc.) with the kind of pull or gear to get off-world on the sly, these jobs are fully fronted by the corps, giving shadowrunners a chance to be spacerunners (and megacorporate lackeys).

- The other orbital stations are all still out there too, and a lot of them had some trouble with the whole CFD thing since they used so much nanotech in their construction and even in the current operations. With so many eyes looking at Gagarin, we could be seeing a space shell game.
- Orbital DK

I am not a man to forget that this is a place for individuals who work not only up in the shadowy peaks but down in the shadowy valleys as well. Looking at the power vacuums at the tops of megacorporations is not the same as looking at what CFD is actually doing to people on the streets. I know what I am. I'm watching for the torches and pitchforks, and at the same time trying to see how we, this new species of *Homo sapiens technicus*, is fitting in, adapting, and trying to find a way to introduce ourselves without the chaos that has come with so many other revelations in the past.

There are three basic pathways head cases can take to get into the public eye. They can come out loud, screaming who they are and hoping the masses don't string them all up in the first night or two. After that they can worry as the megas come down hard on what's left of them and mark them as terrorists or crazies. Alternately, they can come out soft and slowly try to reveal themselves to select trusted individuals and hope that those people are really as trustworthy as they seem. Problem is, people get scared and want to talk to other people who then remind them of all the other scary things that have insidiously tried to integrate themselves into our society, and it blows up in the face of the head case. After that, the megas will come down hard and be able to use lots of clandestine operations and dirty black bag jobs in order to hush them all up and drag them down into labs for study. Third option is to come out with a megacorporate backer and story. Horizon or Evo are the best bet, with Evo the most likely. Problem is, within every population there are those who aren't willing to lie. These folks are going to enter the shadows and whether I'm on JackPoint or not, I'm a shadowrunner, and I don't want a bunch of paranoid head cases vying for spots in my local shadow community. Not that I'm not understanding. I'm one of them. But these will be the weak, the fearful, and the ones that will do really stupid drek like infect a bunch of others for protection in order to survive.

- Already a few of those around. I've come across more than my share of paranoid head cases who have built or taken over various street-level operations by completely infecting their crew. If you're lucky, you'll get a heads up from an insider who jumped ship just in time. Usually you get the family member or former squeeze that's suddenly on the outs.
- Butch

- So now that we see they are coming out strong, what's the megas' play?
- 2XL

- I don't think the Monad thing is a big coming out. They're portraying themselves as some kind of evolution, and they're not really claiming CFD with a lot of supporting evidence. They're just pushing the word out to get their own kind to step out and say hello.
- Glitch

Since we're talking about the spread, I'll cover it briefly. It's done being random. I'm sure there might be a few pure samples out there of the original nanites that we used to flee captivity, but by and large the majority of the infected nanites are already in place. Further spread is either deliberate, like a head case in need of copies for protection or cover, or accidental, like by a megacorp playing with things they shouldn't, e.g., Boston (though that's an extreme example of CFD). Whatever got spread all over Boston was a nasty version from everything we've seen. Other than that debacle, I don't think the head cases that are out there are going to be looking for trouble. Don't get me wrong. A few rogues may try and infect Damian Knight or one of the Telestrian clan, but the world is not going to get overwritten by this. We freaked out early on, as you would expect from most scared children who didn't really realize what they were doing, but it's far more controlled now.

- I don't know if that makes me feel better.
- Slamm-0!

When I started planning how I'd lay out this little update, I debated whether I would open or close with the following piece. As you can see, I made my decision to put it at the end in the most poetic fashion because that is where cures belong; at the end. Don't get all excited, the answer is not a magic pill, simple surgery, or even a long, drawn-out treatment. The answers (note the plural) are varied, but none have been consistently replicable even when run under the best conditions. Every solution has been a multi-step process, and most have been mish-mosh, shotgun projects, based on equal measures of hope and science. Even with that being the case, success is success, and with the way CFD was looking, any success was something to mark. Along with these random successes, several of the megacorporations have worked out solutions for CFD while trying to decipher ways to correct the issues the virus introduced into nanotech. And the virus' use—or more appropriately, abuse—of genetech, has lead to several advancements. Advancements that are drawing the attention of individuals who are still skeptical of nanotech and genetech. And by skeptical, I mean sociopathic in their opposition to their continued use.

- Now we see why he has info on this topic.
- Netcat

- And you're complaining why?
- Balladeer

- That's what I thought.
- Balladeer

The most, and least, successful method I've seen to date has been mind-hacking, due to the complexity of the process and how dangerous it is to the head case, the hunters, and the hackers involved. There's nothing I can say to the complexity of hacking a human node and rewriting it that isn't covered by simply imagining it, but one of the ways they've made the whole process easier is through professional hits to soften the head case target. Even the most proficient of us has a hard time taking out one of us clean. See what I did there? The softened head case is then picked up by a lower-level team, and the mind-hack begins. The deeper discussion on that process is something for a different download. The process has had some full recoveries and is therefore the most successful in my opinion, but the failures have been piling up bodies.

- Rumors say a guy named Fletcher Bissell is particularly good at this process, but very hard to find. Info on him—where he came from, how he learned his process—is unknown.
- Bull

What I call the nanowars is a process that involves filling the head case with special nanites programmed to target the CFD nanites. The process usually leaves behind a head case with a broken personality and no abilities. That broken personality is where we usually come in, as they hire out for a lot of revenge as well as trying to make up for their lack of abilities. The plus side is that the process leaves them non-infectious for a while.

Third trick is the big chill. Drop a head case in a cooler or ice bath and the nanites have to work and burn additional energy to keep the body viable. We're usually involved with the delivery process and not much more, but I've heard of head case hunters who use this as a perfect time to make their move.

Last, and certainly the least common, is what I call the polite method. As strange as it sounds, there are head cases out there that aren't happy with their situation. These rare cases have demonstrated the ability to purge the CFD-infected nanites out of their system. The original personality doesn't return, but the head case ends up with no signs of CFD unless an ultra-hires scan of their brain is used and shows the scarring. This has led others to a darker solution. Under the right pressure, a head case can be forced to purge the nanites and just keep the body. It's not really a cure, but it creates a less-dangerous situation, and there are still a small number of people in the world who would rather see a situation through to a non-violent end.

CFD has done a number on the shadows and the shining lights of the Sixth World. Even through the narrow scope with which I see most of the world I can see the global effect it has had. Though the new Matrix was what first brought the Big Ten together for a touch of cooperation, it was CFD and events in Boston that made them close their iron fists in a handshake and press their collective weight back down on a world that had managed to start to wriggle free of their control.

First it was CFD in the shadows and the "De la Mar"-trix in the public eye, but now there's the Revision and De la Mar's new "SINitiative" to label the world. The megacorps aren't just sitting idly by and letting things happen. They're taking the little bumps, and they're using them to gain momentum in other areas. The shadows are getting narrower. Anyone who doesn't see that is either living in perpetual delusion or a corporate stooge.

- This is how he tries to get back in? Insults and broad speculation? Which of the triumvirate deserve the slap for letting this in again?
- Clockwork

- Let's get into a slap fight here. Please!
- Bull

WHAT'S UP WITH ARES

I would love to bring some major revelation on the continuing mystery that is (well, was) Nicholas "Chuteless" Aurelius, but I've got nothing. Ares is never far from my sights, and one would think something should have come about by now. Outside of speculation that it was bug retaliation, nothing has. But I wouldn't waste an entire section of this piece just to tell you what I don't know about Ares. Instead, I have been busy looking at other Ares execs and activities. A lot of their attention has been turned inward. The primary stockholders have been playing big internal games with the beleaguered mega that could very well lead to a schism large enough to crack the foundation of "America's Corp." Frankly, that's not terribly different than any other time in the history of the megacorporation. What's different now is the unpredictable habits of the current players and the genuine problems Ares has faced in the recent years occurring simultaneously with the Revision and the lower-rated corps getting together and getting uppity. That is to say, there might be more parties who are extremely motivated to ensure that possible schisms erupt.

Damian Knight continues to speak for Ares with his silver tongue while pushing them along with an iron fist. He's not happy at all about Gavilan's new proxy, and he's

showing it, even if not overtly. Knight isn't a fool, and he's making sure to keep all of his dirt digging and support-elimination quiet and precise. Judging by the contracts I've seen and the jobs I'm aware of, his efforts are focused on making sure his power is felt without being seen or directly connected to him.

Unlike those efforts, he has been much more aboveboard and direct when it comes to the contracts he is putting out against UnlimiTech executives. This internal struggle is going to prove very costly and definitely shows signs of being more of a cancer surgery than a minor internal disagreement. One can only presume that all the rumors of bug infiltration in UnlimiTech are true and are the reason for Knight's assaults on their executives. Knight is not the only person going after UT. I haven't spent much time digging into the other contracts to find out who is paying the bills, but they aren't all Knight or even Ares.

- The world of spirits writhes within itself.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- The different Insect spirits don't all work together. A different hive, clutch, brood, etc. could very well be going after the ones in control of or inside UT.
- Frosty

- I've gotten offers from several Johnsons, all with UT ties, for jobs against different parts of the company. Internal strife. They all came at me in clusters, a few at a time, like something was happening. This has happened several times over the past months. I usually pass the gigs along to others, but I've taken part in a few where I knew the bugs were involved.
- Sticks

I'll add this last bit about Knight with the blatant disclaimer that this is a rumor. I have some circumstantial evidence that could be used as support, but it could also just be coincidence. Due to the issues the company is having and the trouble Knight has been facing internally, he has been making moves that look an awful lot like preparation to sell his piece of the pie and possibly go into retirement. He's had very private meetings with both Richard Villiers and Johnny Spinrad, two potential buyers. These could also just have been a bunch of billionaires talking billionaire stuff, like which nation has the best money to wipe your ass with. Alongside these conversations Knight has been purchasing property all over the world and spending millions to get top-of-the-line security across all aspects.

While Knight is trying to wear the shining armor, Arthur Vogel is looking for a green future for Ares, but not necessarily the green of money. Though as noble as going green may sound, Vogel is using red blood to fertilize the fields. Nothing ties directly back to Vogel—he's definitely the cleanest of the Ares' top executives, and he intends to maintain that reputation. But even without his thick dwarven fingers directly in the mix, his influences and agendas are being pushed forward with some very bloody tactics.

Across the globe, Vogel is using his green initiatives to insidiously insert Ares into key markets with green ties. Vogel's moves are working to strengthen ties in and between the UCAS, CAS, AMC, Quebec, and the Carib League. The work isn't designed to reunite broken nations, but instead to create a positive trade atmosphere for Ares to utilize for growth and redevelopment of a "home" that is not just a single nation, friendly to their presence, but half of a continent, with several nations to feed them resources and cash. Vogel's bloody efforts in this endeavor include removing the obstacles Ares faces in these nations. Be they politicians, corporate executives, local leaders, or even crime bosses, they and their families are valid targets in order to soften this region for Ares.

Vogel's contracts have been directed at several of the obvious big targets. Such as members of the Council in the AMC, targeted in order to promote Ares' green initiative as a followup to MCT's polluting ways. Members of Quebec's corporate structure that hate Ares only because of Knight are also in his sights, and Vogel is working that angle to get alongside them while removing obstacles that won't allow them to get over the past and see a better future. He's also dealing with forces within the UCAS government that have been distancing themselves from Ares while also working to undermine NeoNET's efforts to relocate from Boston but stay within the UCAS, which might bring them in conflict with Ares in some strongholds and short-circuit some green efforts. Similar political efforts are occurring in the CAS, but corporate efforts here are focused on breaking down the political connections with the Atlantean Foundation while influencing corporate connections between the arcanacorp and Ares. In the Carib League, it's a shotgun blast of operations to clear opposition to a greener world, find groups, especially eco-terrorists, keen on being supplied with Ares Arms, cut out political support for other corps, and insinuate blame for most of the violence on rival corps to decrease local support as well. Vogel is a savvy tactician who is not afraid to make the hard decisions.

- Hearing about Vogel in this light, I'm wondering if the UCAS wouldn't have benefited from his presidency. Maybe Vogel 2080 could be his next move?
- Sticks

- Vogel may seem vicious, but he has nothing on Colloton.
- Stone

While Knight and Vogel are working toward the end of saving and expanding their corporate home, they are under attack from parties unknown. No one has put out

a contract on either of those two directly, but at least thirty other Ares executives, VP and above, are marked. I've made a little money off a few of these, partly to keep the skills sharp, partly to find out who's paying. It took half a dozen jobs to track down a single source and at least two of those didn't connect. The money trail leads back to a small corporate front, actually in the PCC, called Synergy, Inc. They run spas around Phoenix, Albuquerque, Salt Lake City, and Las Vegas that welcome visitors from around the world for extended stays. They're building quite a reputation for themselves as the place to go for everything from corporate weekends to rehab. That's what the corporate rumors say at least. They don't have a Matrix presence, which is odd. I haven't dug much beyond that, but there must be more in order for them to be funding hits on Ares executives.

- Synergy takes in execs from all over the globe, and they don't allow personal security beyond their outer compounds. The actual facility is for clients only.
- Mihoshi Oni

- Security inside must be solid as well. I heard about a top-rate team that was headed into a Synergy facility outside of Vegas for an exec extraction since it seemed the weakest link. They went in but never came out, and the exec stuck it out with her original employer.
- DangerSensei

The other contracts didn't reveal any direct connections, and there are still plenty of contracts outstanding that might be from other sources. Ares has a lot of enemies, and now that those enemies have seen them taken down a few rungs on the megacorporate ladder, it's open season. These are also only the professional contracts going out to hitmen. These aren't shadowrunner gigs being brokered in the backrooms of seedy bars and clubs. They're trouble on a lot of levels.

AZTECHNOLOGY: FERTILE FIELDS OF BLOOD

At the height of the dragon civil war drama, I kept my fingers crossed and was always ready to make a move if I could get a chance to eliminate a few key Aztechnology executives and open up a few weaknesses for the wyrms to exploit. Don't get me wrong, I was happy to take contracts from the Azzies too, but if I got to throw the lead in their direction for money, I was quick to accept. Like any job working against a megacorporation, once I line them up in my sights and take the shot, I don't just stop looking once the job is done. A true professional keeps tabs to make sure the job doesn't have unexpected ripples, like the mark having a double, and to watch for any potential follow-up work. In the case of Aztechnology, the volume of work for and against the megacorp has been high since Sirrurg flattened Borinquen. I've had much to track but find the bloodiest highlights in three areas; NatVat recovery, arcane efforts in the southern hemisphere, and something called Project Vulcan that has connections to Boston.

Many expected Aztechnology to just write off NatVat and focus efforts and nuyen in other places. The Azzies didn't do as expected, and instead have been fertilizing their new food-production fields with the blood of their rivals. They're using a fertilizing process that has been so successful over the past two years that internal reports indicate their foodstuff production rate is higher now than it was before the loss of Borinquen. Those internal reports don't match at all the external reports of food shortages and product rationing to their Stuffer Shack branches, and even the closing of several hundred Stuffer Shack stores.

To keep this news quiet and the books in the black, Aztechnology has been contracting on rivals left, right, and center. Precision strikes by unaffiliated contractors that slow, stop, redirect, or undermine the operations of their smaller rivals so that the megacorp can come in to buy out the company cheap. If a rival double- or triple-A starts sniffing around the wounded companies, looking to scoop them up before the Azzies, contracts go out to make sure individuals understand the ramifications of such a decision. We know the Azzies are bloodthirsty bastards, and so do most of the folks above a certain pay grade in the other megas, so while the masses see Aztechnology as their savior from starvation, people in power know what happens when the Azzies are after you.

I enjoy trying to solve mysteries. One of the advantages of my evolved state is that sleep isn't completely necessary. I can let my body rest and still have conscious thoughts, and when I do let my brain rest, I can still use a small portion of it, like a little secondary processor, to think. When my watch on Aztechnology turned up a strange series of events and data that all had a unique connection, I made that my latest project. Above I simply referred to it as arcane efforts in the southern hemisphere because that's the umbrella that fit best. The works all connect to a research station down on Antarctica, but the data being moved around revolves around the Sangre del Diablo trees, repairing fovae, the use of tempo, and extensive artifact hunting. How they all link together is a question you can head down to Antarctica and ask one of their researchers, but around the rest of the world you can look for Aztechnology fingerprints on jobs involving any of those topics and then watch out for the double-cross—because that's the other connection I found.

Any contract specialist will tell you killing is a risky solution to a problem. It's clean in terms of that individual and anything they may have known, but it leaves

behind possible enemies with primarily emotional motivations for their responses. Emotional responses aren't rational and rarely help out the bottom line. When a very methodical organization, like a megacorporation, consistently resorts to this solution, it means the person in charge of the operation is a bloodthirsty psycho, or the paydata is so valuable or damaging it has to be covered up completely, and anyone who may have had eyes on it eliminated. Aztechnology has been putting out contracts on entire runner teams right alongside the runners getting hired for a job. Professional contractors are posing as bodyguards for Mr. Johnson to start getting info on the team and often leaving bugs on them or their vehicles while the meet is going on. It's ugly, but it's Aztechnology—and they must think this stuff is important.

I've been collecting this dangerous data when I can. I'm not up on arcane theory, so most of the information that's been gathered is over my head, but I'd be happy to share it with JackPoint in another document down the road. What I have gotten from the things I've read is a process that can repair foveae (magical voids) with the use of several specific artifacts using data and observations made somewhere in Antarctica that involves feeding tempo users to Sangre del Diablo trees. Sounds like classic Aztechnology blood magic, but the data gathered by the Azzies have several conflicting references.

- Using blood magic to repair a fovae is quite counterproductive.
- Arete

- Modern blood magic. We do a lot to shape the positive and negative effects that mana manipulation has on the manasphere. Many cultures, including the real Aztecs, had very positive views of sacrificial rituals. It's only the modern view that brings the taint onto blood magic.
- Winterhawk

- So what would happen with this ritual and the modern view on blood magic?
- Netcat

- Likely the opposite effect. The ritual would grow the fovae instead of making it smaller. I avoided the term fix or repair, because the fovae aren't damaged.
- Frosty

Project Vulcan has something to do with Boston's quarantine and looks to be Aztechnology's contribution to the disaster that they are trying to clean up. I'm sure most of the paydata for the project is behind the lockdown, but plenty of contract jobs have been going out for people outside the QZ with connections to this project. I have offers out to purchase paydata on this through almost every fixer I know. It's good back-end bonus money, and if they deliver to me first they get a warning about who they're dealing with. It still amazes me how many runners don't dig into who they're working for before running off to do a job.

- What's the paydata say?
- Slamm-0!

- The old Riser was a backstabbing asshole, the new Riser is a clever, backstabbing asshole. Those paydata purchases have turned out badly for a lot of teams. The offer is a honey pot with a nasty virus.
- Clockwork

- So you're saying Riser is offing them when he gets the paydata?
- Glitch

- As strange as this sounds, it's not Riser. He's playing the paydata deals square, but someone else is piggybacking off him to hit the teams after they meet him but before they deliver to Aztechnology.
- Balladeer

- Someone else, or just a different version of Riser?
- Butch

THE DARKEST SHADOWS

While CFD and the megas pull a lot of our attention, it's the darker spaces in the shadows that often come up and bite runners in the hoop because they aren't prepared for monsters worse than them. I've taken a look at a few of those, and here are my observations. I'll admit I didn't peer into this darkness for too long, because I knew what it would do to me. I'll drop a short header on each in case you want something specific.

- He *is* the darkest shadows. Why are you all still reading this?
- /dev/grrl

- Why are you?
- Man-of-Many-Names

- I understood that!
- Slamm-0!

- Did you?
- Man-of-Many-Names

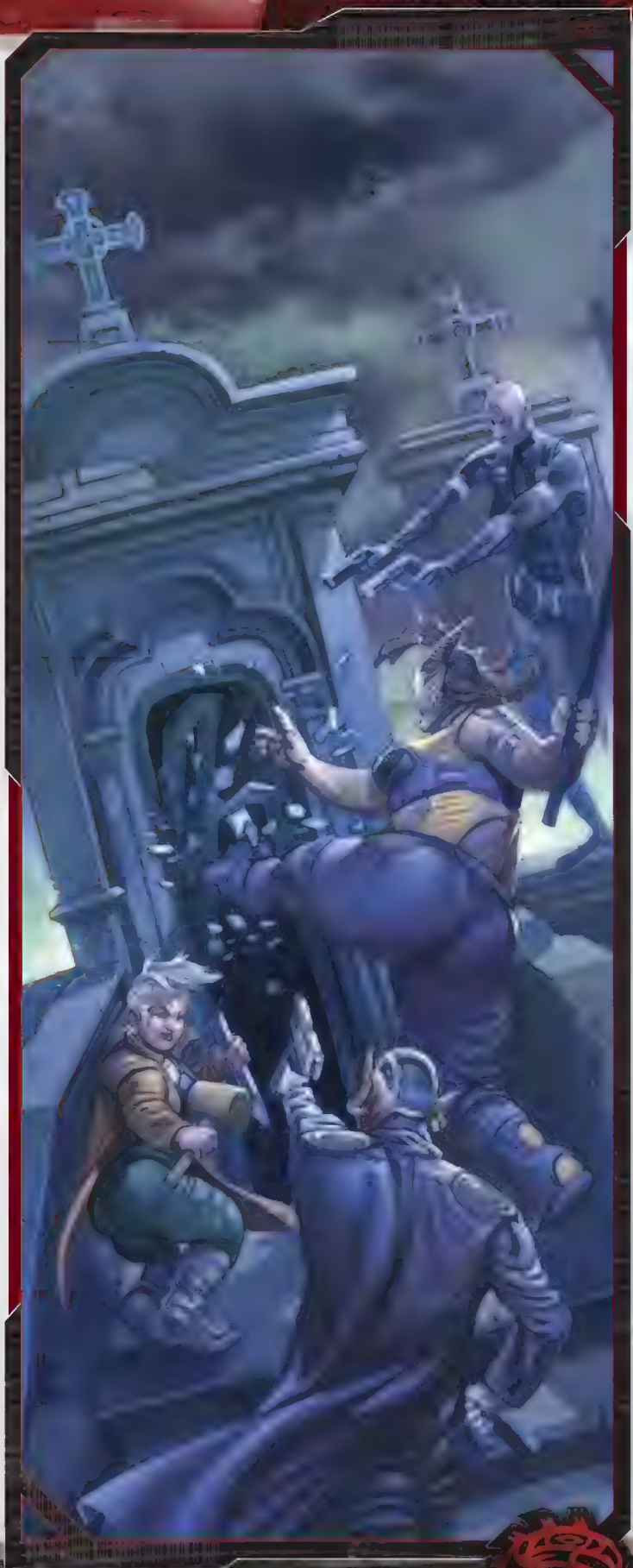
ORDO MAXIMUS: STAKES AT THE READY

Sometimes we must step into the darkness, unsure what lies behind the veil of blackness, in order to see what is going on in our world. Other times we stand too

long at the threshold, peering into the darkness, and the darkness then comes out at us. The works of our often-mentioned Ordo Maximus, the gentlemen's club that shrouds the darker secrets of the true order, have struggled to stay within the darkness thanks to the actions of Martin de Vries. Martin is not an assassin in the traditional sense but he is certainly decreasing the population numbers of a particular sect of metahumanity. Those infected with HMHVV. This nocturnal war has contracts going out on both sides and doesn't look to be ending anytime soon.

While de Vries usually works alone he has been hiring runners for two roles, backup and misdirection. The former doctor is only a single vampire and though powerful, he still needs help when working against greater numbers. Those numbers are a tactical advantage his enemies often have thanks to their lack of moral compunction in creating stake-fodder. He usually hires runners with experience hunting Infected or paracritters for cash. To be clear, that's cash as opposed to hunting for revenge, religion, or having a psychological disorder. Several of the runners he has worked with have offered to join his efforts permanently, and though de Vries declines their offers, he usually gives those who make that offer a chance to help him out through misdirection. Those individuals are paid to keep hunting vampires for a short time as de Vries switches cities.

On the other side, the Ordo Maximus is after de Vries in order to stop him from killing their members. The vampires of the OM couldn't care less about the street-vamps and their infantile trid-fantasy lifestyles. They'd let de Vries hunt down those blood wasters to his unbeating heart's content, but Martin only wades through them to get to the real power. The OM was using the Infected youth to try to stop de Vries, but as that plan has not been working they've been exploring other routes. From the moment de Vries was outed as one of the Infected, the OM has been running a smear campaign about the tawdry life he begged to get into after his wife's death. They created and twisted stories to paint the vampire hunter as a bloodthirsty sociopath killing and smiling his way from town to town while signing books. They painted his books as propaganda and as a psychological release to make Martin not see himself as the monster he truly is. While most people have had the expected reaction and fear de Vries as much as they would any other creature of the night, even more in most cases, some have flocked to the man as a victim of his virus. The Order of de Vries, as they call themselves, see him as a tragic figure, much like that of the original Dracula. For those special crazies the OM skipped the smear campaign and went straight to direct action. As most individuals of low or absent morals will do, they chose to go after the innocent in order to lure out a guilt-ridden target. The Ordo have been targeting the Order to get Martin to come out and play. The ploy has worked but none of the traps have sprung fast enough to get de



Vries and on at least two occasions has left a member of the Order Infected. I haven't gathered anything yet on who these new vampires are blaming for their current state, but the latest de Vries novel, *Overexposure*, definitely drew some inspiration from all of this.

- The outing, combined with *Overexposure,* has pushed up the number of vampire hunters in the world right alongside the vampires. Difference being most of the new hunters are really just murderous thugs out to steal from the slain undead or wannabe Van Helsings who have no business hunting the Infected.
- Hannibelle

- The hunters certainly thin faster than the hunted, especially since you can't rapidly regrow your hunter population. What you can do is grow a quick population of Infected and then use those to take out a rather pesky hunter. This leads to shadow work as well when those bloodsuckers feed from the wrong person and get a target painted on them.
- Stone

- Don't forget those who are thrown to the wolves after they have served their purpose.
- Hannibelle

SHEDIM: ON THE VERGE OF EXTINCTION

I will openly admit that when the shedim first arrived, I was terrified and ready for the zombie apocalypse. Something about the walking dead, specifically zombies, has always terrified me. My subconscious desire to become an amazing marksman was driven by the need to hit a zombie in the head. Now that I've learned a little bit more about the shedim, I'm really no less viscerally frightened. I just know that their existence is not going to lead to a world of walking corpses. Or at least that's what I tell myself.

I know the pathway that the astral beings we call shedim used to get here was closed when the Watergate Rift shut. I also know about the existence of master shedim, more powerful shedim that could summon and control the less powerful of their kind. The summoning part has ceased, but the control part has become far more focused. While the master shedim cannot call for more of their kin, or call back ones that have been disrupted, they have adapted how they will survive in this world.

Now we all know how touchy metahumans can be about other beings taking over their bodies, and even though the shedim can inhabit corpses, empty living shells are so much nicer. But that means a metahuman must be displaced. I'm all for the joining of two intelligences to make a better, more evolved being, but this is rarely the case with shedim. While the AIs that integrate themselves into the mind of a subject through nanoreneurofication are at least somewhat familiar with metahumanity or the world we live in, the shedim are a completely alien intellect and don't integrate the minds they take. This lack of human experience and the fact that they don't think of things the same way people do makes them dangerous. Even more dangerous is the question everyone has asked when they learn about them: "What do they want?"

The current answer to that question is a frightening one and the reason why so many contracts go out that involve hunting shedim, specifically master shedim. With their numbers dwindling, the efforts of the shedim are focused on one thing, opening a route to their home metaplane so more of their kind can come through. This doesn't sound frightening when someone thinks about how long the Watergate Rift was open, but the rift was like an ever-changing maze between our metaplanes that led to nowhere far more often than it led here. The master shedim aren't looking for another maze to nowhere—they're looking for a doorway to prop wide open and let everyone in to the party, including anything else that wants to come over from their metaplane.

The jobs aren't easy, and they always require someone with astral fighting skills because knocking the shedim out of the shell is only half the fight. Once they're out, the fight is all on the astral—and the shedim are not stand-and-fight types. They run. On a plane where movement goes at the speed of thought, that leaves only a small window to get them before they are in the astral winds, looking for a new body.

- I've seen and heard that the new body they seek is often that belonging to their astral opponents. They've become very adept at locating the physical shell of astrally projecting mages. If a displaced shedim spends any time sticking around for the fight, get back to your body quick, because that's where they will head once they get a lock.
- Arete

The current hot spots for the shedim are Yakut, the PCC, the Sioux Nation, Northern CalFree, and the Congo. Those four locations either have strong ambient mana levels or powerful local sites that the shedim are trying to use for a metaplanar gateway. This makes them prime spots for work against them. It's good to remember that the master shedim are smart and don't spend much time doing the grunt work in these places. They tend to show up for rituals and other important events. They spend the rest of their time blending into society and gathering funding for their efforts—efforts that are often hidden as humanitarian-aid organizations. The Congan Youth Association is a front led by a master shedim hiding among the organization's board members. The verge of extinction is a wide one, and if they can find a way to open a door home, they will quickly change who is on that verge.

- The work that was being done in Boston by Dr. Dyna Mite was a hot target for the shedim before the quarantine went up, and they've been poking at the wall whenever they could. The ability to keep a gateway open between metaplanes wasn't even the reason. The data they wanted was all the metaplanar mapping the doctor did.
- Frosty

BLACK LODGE: DRAGON-SIZE BULLSEYE

Even in my new state of being, there are still some groups that just cause my pituitary to involuntarily create ACTH. The Black Lodge is one of those groups. When I found out they were a first-strike target of the dragons if the civil war ever kicked off, I found my second reason for actually rooting for a war and for a successful opening volley from the dragons. I never thought I'd do well as a dragon vassal if they won it all, but at least I'd be able to help thin the ranks of the Black Lodge before I went down. The war didn't happen, but the contracts have been slowly flowing from the camps of the various dragons around the world since even before they were all in the public spotlight.

Since I've been focused on the observational side of the business instead of the trigger-pulling side, I've been able to work at confirming the identities of several members of the Black Lodge and looking into their current activities. The arrangement of the group makes it difficult but not impossible to track and connect members from Lodge to Lodge, you just have to monitor every member until they connect with another Lodge. I have files on twenty-six members. I'll run down three who have contracts on them and what they seem to be engaged in.

- And the rest will be made available once he's back in the fold. This is crap. Why don't we let him back in, get the data, and then boot him again?
- Clockwork

- Why don't you just go find him and get the data for us?
- Netcat

- What a classy way to say "Drop dead."
- Slamm-0!

EVERETT DUNKIRK; LOGISTICS AND ACQUISITIONS, NEONET, ST. LOUIS OFFICES; LODGE OF THE BLACK RIVER

Dunkirk isn't the most powerful player in NeoNET, but his position has him ideally placed to further a pair of agenda items on the to-do list of the Black Lodge: the reunification of the U.S. of A. and/or the declaration of St. Louis as a free city. Recent moves and maneuvers by Richard Villiers have been pointing to efforts to make St. Louis the next home of NeoNET, while at the same time pushing the city to claim its independence from all nations.

These items may seem counterintuitive. Why reunify the United States, only to allow one of its major metro areas to secede? The moves here are setting up as many winning options as possible without significant crossover that would end up being self-defeating. A reunified U.S. with NeoNET at home in the heartland? Win. An independent St. Louis with NeoNET as not only the first of the Big Ten to create a major presence but as the megacorp calling it their headquarters city? Win. A reunified U.S. surrounding an independent St. Louis that is heavily supported by NeoNET? Double win.

How does all this benefit the Black Lodge is the next question. Thanks to a bunch of magical principles I can't fully explain, St. Louis has a strong mana flow thanks to the Mississippi River and the Gateway Arch. Much like every other major site of arcane power, the Black Lodge wants to control it, and for that they need a strong presence. This is something that can be arranged through Dunkirk once NeoNET has a need for more citizens in the city. No matter what Villiers' reason for wanting to settle down in St. Louis is, Dunkirk and the Black Lodge are also supporting the move.

The last thing to know is who's after Dunkirk. Whether you're looking over this info to know who you might be pissing off if you take a shadow contract to cover him, or if you want to know where to drop off the body for a solid payday, knowledge pays. The contact for this particular contract is Hokai Kitiga, a St. Louis fixer with connections to MCT, meaning Lung is the dragon behind the deed, but some good old-fashioned megacorporate shenanigans is what the street sees.

- A little free advice. The Black Lodge has a security detail on Dunkirk at all times. You won't see any of them unless they feel there's a threat to him. They have supplied him with a few protective charms to prevent the one-shot kill. Even a Barrett won't punch through in one shot.
- Balladeer

ELIJAH "BLACK CROW" HIGHWATER; PUEBSEC OFFICE OF ARCANE AFFAIRS; LODGE OF THE DESERT WINDS

Highwater spends his days and nights investigating magical crimes all over the PCC as part of the corporate nation's Office of Arcane Affairs. His primary office is listed in Santa Fe, but he spends most of his time at a small office station in Teec Nos Pas, near the former Four Corners Monument. Even though the PCC does not recognize the former states, the monument itself is known in magical circles as a powerful site for location rituals and accessing the metaplanes thanks to decades of low-cycle mana buildup.

According to the OAA, Highwater is out here because he uses the Four Corners site—known as Habananne or

spirit door to the PCC—as a ritual site for tracking criminals and even chasing free spirit outlaws across planes. While this may be true, it isn't the main reason the Black Crow spends so much time nesting here. That's Alayna Evanstar. She's a young prospect for the Black Lodge who Highwater has been grooming for a few years now. She and Hightower have a far more intimate relationship than one would expect from a couple with a forty-year age gap, though Highwater barely looks a day over thirty. He hasn't had any kind of leónization or gene therapy, but rumors abound about a metaplane he's found that ages backwards. It's a rumor, but Highwater is awfully spry for sixty-eight.

While rumors of an age-reversing metaplane might be enough to get a price on his head, that isn't why he's got sights over his heart. The Black Crow flies all over the PCC, and everywhere he goes he sows seeds of discord between the PCC and the other member nations of the NAN, especially the Sioux, but he doesn't discriminate. His efforts often involve runners in the various cities he stops in. Usually two teams, one working on his PuebSec work while the other works at his Lodge goals. Both think they are working for PuebSec if they dig into Mr. Johnson's background, and Highwater is smart enough to mask the two jobs to maintain the ruse.

When it comes time to cash in on this contract, runners have two options: dead or alive, and alive is going to net you five times more in the old Z-O bank account. While Highwater will be snagged (and either bagged or tagged) in the PCC, delivery of the live target has to occur in the Sioux Nation. The contract is handled through a fixer named Feather, with tight connections to Henequen Enterprises in Cheyenne, and thus we know the contract comes via Henequen.

As a brief side point, no one is paying for Evanstar openly, but I'm sure plenty of individuals would love to hear what Highwater lets slip during pillow talk.

- Just because the fixer has ties to Henequen does not automatically mean the job originates from that dragon. Any other dragon could be using that tiny little bit of info to throw off the scent.
- Thorn

- I know Feather. He's not sure who's footing the bill, but he told me his initial payment was made in orichalcum ore. The rock wasn't processed and actually still had some polyp growth on it. Might be a second ruse to throw off the trail, but it could also mean a dragon with access to an oceanic treasure reserve.
- Winterhawk

DARIELLA DE HEÑA LA VELASQUEZ; BATISTA ENFORCER; LODGE OF THE ISLAND BLADE

Though her position within the Batista regime seems to be nothing special, Velasquez wields considerable power from behind the scenes. She has been smart enough to avoid moving up the hierarchy but has managed to get dirt, leverage, or favors from every soldado turned jefe who has moved past her. Though she is living in Havana, her shadowy efforts are spread all over the Carib League. She has been contracting and running shadow ops that seem to be playing the reunifications angle from the south.

The Lodge here is working with the Lodges in the CAS to sew some discontent between the Carib League nations and the CAS while also fanning the ever-burning embers of conflict between the CAS and Aztlan. As usual, these are the kinds of operation the Black Lodge runs with a half dozen operatives all working as blinds and misdirects. The goal is to make the CAS feel uncomfortable and start looking at the UCAS as a possible ally. Velasquez has a very delicate touch and is the perfect person for the job, since pushing too far could turn discontent into open war, something no one in this region wants.

The contract on Velasquez is lucrative and being paid in S-K stock. That means the first suspect is Lofwyr, but we all know how worthwhile those kinds of clues are. Based on some other more well-hidden (and therefore more likely) data I found, the contract is coming from either the Sea Dragon or Hestaby. While Hestaby may be exiled, she remains a great dragon and likely to kick all our hoops even in a rigged match. Paying off runners with stock from S-K seems a great way to get back at a megacorporation in a creative fashion. As for the Sea Dragon, she has a lot of interests around the Carib League and wants them to stay as free-wheeling and open as ever. Should the Lodge get the UCAS and CAS back together, it would put more pressure on the Carib League and possibly make them a target for UCAS/CAS imperial expansion.

- Velasquez has been scouting lately. Her name has been making the rounds among the island's wizzers. Expect the Lodge of the Island Blade to expand soon.
- Kane

REVISING HISTORY

The biggest source of contracts currently being floated is not CFD, Ares' restructuring issues, the Azzie's ever-present issues, or NeoNET's desire for a new home. It's what the shadows have been referring to as the "Megacorporate Revision" (also known as the Megacorporate Audit). While at least half of the Big Ten have been enduring issues over the past few years, their AA kin have been coordinating and trying to change the landscape of the Corporate Court. Nothing boosts the number of contracts and contractors like a megacorporate war. Whether the AAs had that as part of their plan or not, that seems as if it will be the inevitable result.

While this is an absolutely marvelous time to be taking shots at the Big Ten to try to grab a little bigger percentage of the profits, that's not what the AAs are doing. They're trying to gather together a gang of their buddies and knock one of the ten from their throne. The idea is somewhat akin to the Pacific Prosperity Group, but instead of just mutual support, these AAs are going for AAA status through mergers and hostile takeovers, trying to gain a spot through sheer size or combined corporate power. All while trying to get ahead of the Megacorporate Audit that the Corporate Court is performing on "random" A- or greater-rated megacorps.

That audit is the friendly face of this whole process. The CC is making everything look all above-board for the smaller corps, but under the table, the Big Ten are lining up shot after shot on their lesser-ranked kin. Behind the scenes, both sides are setting contracts to get the results they want. Hits on auditors, schedulers, and key fiscal personnel are being filled to alter the speed of the process in favor of whoever's footing the bill.

On the CC side of things, they're contracting runners to get internal data on each corp before they roll in for their audits so they can know exactly where to look. These jobs are primarily contracted to teams that know how to keep their work quiet and undetectable, but when that plan fails, the CC has multi-phase backup plans that are more interesting to other, more violence-prone teams. When a job goes sideways like this, the CC quickly puts out three jobs.

Since their primary goal is to secure the data, the first thing they do is contract to make sure the team with the data delivers. This can be a hit on the team to get the data or a protection gig to keep trouble off their back while they work to make the exchange. Which call they make depends on their working reputation with the primary runner team, who the job was against, and which member of the CC staff is handling the operation. There are quite a few bloodthirsty SOBs in the upper ranks of the CC, and "dead runners tell no tales" is just as common in their circles as "geek the mage first" is in ours.

The second job is against the corp that was originally targeted. This operation is going to be either a coverup or a shakeup. A coverup tries to cover what the first job was after so the corp doesn't know they're being set up for the next audit. This means some misdirection being laid out to either throw suspicion at another corp or away from the data that was snagged. The shakeup is much less clandestine. In order to keep the corp focused on issues other than covering up for the data they just had stolen, they're hit with some serious attacks. Assassinations of key personnel involved in the data, extractions with a high body count, or contracts on their executives. This keeps them dodging bullets and worrying about their own hoop and not focusing on covering the corp's collective posterior.

The third job is my favorite. A copy of the data that was stolen is given to another runner team to plant back in another system at the target corp. The data is buried deep but will be discovered by the auditors, and the CC will come down hard with penalties on the corp for trying to hide the data.

- These jobs cost the CC quite a bit, but the fines they levy against the corp for obstructing the audit usually recoups the cost. If you think you're being contracted for some part of this keep that in mind during negotiations. The CC is going to make their money back, and probably more, so push it a little.
- Thorn

- This is exactly the kind of job we shouldn't be doing. Why would any runner in their right mind work to help the CC and the BigTen tighten the noose they have on the world? We have a chance to help hurt the big guys by helping the little guys.
- /dev/grrl

- You mean helping the smaller big guys. While I see what you're saying, we're just trading one master for another. Now I'm on board when we look at it as more corps means more work. If all these little guys join together and just become a couple more big guys, it's a lot harder to know who you're working for. Everything becomes internal, and those jobs suck because the internal forces tend to make up info faster than you can pull the jobs, and then they don't blame each other, they blame the runners. Corporate politics suck.
- Ecotope

- Hey /dev/, how many runners "in their right mind" do *you* know? This is just the way of the world. If runners overthrow one of the big boys, it will be because the other big boys lined us up to do it.
- Slamm-0!

On the other side of the battle we're looking at A- and AA-rated corps teaming up. Well, at least teaming up as you would expect corporate sharks to do. It's really more like pack hunting. While they're looking to work together to try to take down or compete with the other apex predators, they're going to have to set up their own pecking order beforehand. This means jobs contracted to remove competition for the top spots in their new corporate consortiums.

Much like the operations that occurred during the formation of the Manhattan Development Consortium in New York, we'll see everything from direct hits targeted at the higher ups to broad-scale terror intended to sew chaos and disturb internal operations just enough to keep the executives looking inward instead of out. Some of the best data I can give you here isn't what's going on—we'll all see that eventually—but which folks are teaming up.

There are eight different AA corps that seem to be leading conglomeration efforts, each with half a dozen primary supporters and dozens of potential smaller allies that are often shared between the bigger groups. These smaller corps are just looking for the best place to land when all of this rolls into a corporate war, and they aren't just looking at AAs. The AAAs may get a little bloated from all this as well. The coalitions and some of their interests and efforts are next up on the hit list.

THE LITTLE EIGHT

Just about every A-rated corp out there is now looking to merge or be purchased by an AA in order to gain the advantages of extraterritoriality. On the other side, all the AA-rated corps are looking to pull in more value and leverage because the audit has been hammering them. Several of them are up for reclassification, and losing extraterritoriality could be really bad news for companies that are doing things on their property the local government would not approve of when they come in looking. And look they will—if not for the actual benefit of their citizens but for the monetary benefit of graft and blackmail. This is another one of those places where opportunities for wetwork have skyrocketed. It's a hell of a lot cheaper to pay a low-rent hitter or a small team of rookie runners to off some greedy government goon than it is to grease his palms. Not the point. The point is these corporations getting together is hot right now, and we are also getting jobs trying to keep them from coming to terms on mergers and acquisitions. Some of these jobs are contracted through the CC, while others are megacorp-specific as they try to prevent other corporations from cutting into their territory.

Zeta-ImpChem is at the top of discussions involving **Tanamyre Resources**, **Eastern Tiger**, and **ESUS**. Tanamyre is the tenacious Australian AA megacorp that diversified enough to be multinational and built up enough value at home to gain AA status, but the audit is threatening that value. Eastern Tiger was soaring with the new Matrix initiative. They had infrastructure contracts all over Southeast Asia, including Hong Kong. Then NeoNET came after them in the CC, and they lost big time. They still bring value to the table and a potential internal expansion of host security and their entire telecommunications infrastructure. ESUS seemed like a strange fit, but they bring another European power into this world-spanning coop.

The concept is that each company will maintain their current moniker, the entire group will be under the ***zictretesus*** corporate umbrella. The Roman sounding name over the ten-spoked black and red umbrella logo will probably make future generations think that zictretesus means umbrella. The corp name is all the initials of the involved groups, and it is intentionally uncapitalized to avoid any of the corps being seen as more important than any other. This move epitomizes the mood within these corps. They have the value and power to easily hold onto AA status, but they will probably lack the coordination to earn the AAA rating they deserve based on sheer size, which is why they are engaging in talks—we'll see where those talks end up.

We all know **Maersk Incorporated Assets** does a lot more than shipping and are far from being stripped of their AA status. While that may be true, they are also not about to sit idle while A- and AA-rated corps are merging and growing right past them. Their first stop was another secure AA, **Hildebrandt-Kleinfort-Bernal**. Alongside the solid British banking firm they've reached out and pulled in **Aerospatiale SA**, **Federated-Boeing**, and **United Oil Industries**. The new corp is tentatively labeled ***HKB-Maersk Incorporated Assets***. Any brands and subsidiaries would likely keep their names to maintain business as usual.

- Don't any of these groups have some branding experts somewhere on their vast payrolls? Honestly, these names are not doing it for me.
- Dr. Spin

While the details of the deals are still in negotiations, this corporate group has already begun a few projects together. The funding of HKB, naval power of Maersk, aeronautics engineering prowess of Aerospatiale and F-B, and offshore oil-rig infrastructure of United Oil are already working together on a project internally referred to as Ethereal. The goal of the project is not clear but seems to involve a mobile living platform at sea, almost like a floating city or manmade island. They aren't working unmolested, though, as contracts are being listed for a number of top researchers from the corps through channels leading back to the Sea Dragon. It doesn't help that the corps involved don't like each other much, but the power and potential profit involved can overcome a lot.

Lone Star Security Services may still be behind Knight Errant in overall security contracts, but they have enough diversity to surpass the Ares subsidiary in value and have no desire to lose their AA status. The CC would be hard-pressed to knock them down, but they will find that task standing near the cusp of impossibility if the merger between **LSSS**, **Aegis Cognito**, **Manadyne**, and **DocWagon** actually moves forward. The new parent megacorp, ***OmniStar,*** will likely only exist in coded contracts, but the resulting megacorporation will surpass Ares in estimated value.

As one would expect during a merger between a security firm, an independent intelligence agency, an arcane powerhouse, and the top emergency-medical-service provider in the world, the company will have a lot to offer client cities, nations, businesses, and even other megacorporations. The trouble in Boston has done some value damage to both Manadyne and DocWagon, making them more receptive to the idea of merging, but no

corporation is ever completely happy getting mashed up with someone else. Even though this group will likely maintain a lot of their independence from one another, there are several executives in each company who are fighting the efforts. Often through very bloody means.

The major Japanacorps have been around for a while, but none of them started as just a single corporation. They grew from mergers, acquisitions, and skilled investments (as well as the downfalls of their rivals). They are all household names with subsidiaries that are also household names, much like the lead corp in the merger of five A- and AA-rated Japanacorps would create a new fourth power that would surpass both Shiawase and Renraku in value. **Monobe International**, **Daiatsu**, **Komatsu**, **Sony**, and **Yakashima** are discussing a merger that will make them the second-largest megacorporation in Japan, behind only Mitsuhama Computer Technologies.

The move is being spearheaded by Monobe in hopes of finally getting a seat on the Corporate Court, possibly at the expense of Renraku, putting them at odds. The new merged mega, which would likely keep the ***Monobe*** name and possibly remove the International, would expand their interests in pharmaceuticals, electronics, vehicle manufacture, and shipping and logistics, putting them at odds with plenty of the other sharks in the megacorporate pool. The biggest turmoil coming out of all of this is centered around a single piece: Chrysler-Nissan. The subsidiary of Sony has been making noises of separating for a while now and may be looking to find a new corporate umbrella to stand under. The possibility of the Chrysler side pulling C-N back to North America is strong.

Europe has a strange situation to deal with. They already have some cooperation between A- and AA-rated corps in the NEEC that try to stem the tide of Saeder-Krupp's continental domination. With the audit obviously focusing on downgrading as many corps as possible to increase the power of the AAAs, expect S-K and NeoNET to be pushing for members of the NEEC to get pushed around. To avoid this, a very unlikely, and possibly explosive, corporate merger is in the works. The **Frankfurt Bank Association** is the financial center and backbone of a unification of **Proteus AG** and **AG Chemie**. These bitter rivals are putting a bloody past behind them in order to survive an attack of red tape and bureaucracy that could put all three corps at risk. The origin of this unholy union came with both AG's coming to the FBA as a merger partner and the FBA seeing the greater possibilities of all three joined together. A fourth AA, **Global Sandstorm**, saw this European powerhouse as a great team to join in order to better oppose S-K in other areas of the globe by making them worry more about home. While they still won't rival NeoNET or S-K, they'll surpass at least half of the other AAAs in value. Though all of this is contingent on Proteus and AG Chemie not brawling internally, especially since we're very likely to be hired for a healthy bit of waxwork to stir the pot. Even if those two can't stay friendly, the FBA and Global Sandstorm can stay merged under the most perfect megacorporate name ever, FBAGS. Which is, of course, just a placeholder.

Gaeatronics has rested peacefully in the shade of Shiawase Energy for decades. The energy company was happy to be the second-largest energy corp in the world. When the audit hit them with a downgrade due to the easily manipulated value of energy (which has since returned to normal levels), they were in trouble. To improve their position, they used the sudden increase in corporate value (thanks to the sudden increase in energy value) to lure **Amalgamated Studios** into a lucrative merger—a merger that also created a need for a new audit. Shortly after these two came together, **Shibata Construction & Engineering**, an A-rated megacorp owned primarily by Buttercup, the Evo board member, and former fellow member of the Pacific Prosperity Group, approached the merged pair and offered to join. While the two were sure of their tentative ***Gaeatronics-Amalgamated Productions*** merger being enough for the upcoming audit, they had no problems hedging the deal with a good deal from a board member of one of the CC members.

The move raised a lot of suspicion in uninformed corporate circles, but the shadows can see the truth. Buttercup is hedging her bets and keeping an AA that she can fall back on should the CFD blowback bring Evo crashing down. Since the Shibata deal is not yet set in stone, a lot of shady deals and backroom stabbings are going on trying to keep Buttercup focused on the present and saving Evo, instead of the future and a place to hide.

While rumors are still flying about some kind of deal between NeoNET and SpIn, the AA in the pair is not sitting idly by waiting for their chance to be audited into oblivion. **Spinrad Industries** is lining up deals with **Chalmers & Cole Assoc.**, **Phoenix Biotechnologies**, **Lusiada**, **Sol Media**, **Regency Megamedia**, and **UCAS Online** to pull them all into the Industries part of their name. While SpIn should already be valued higher than Horizon and Wuxing, Inc., a dramatic move would push them past Shiawase, Ares Macrotechnology, and possibly Evo. While that won't get them a seat at the table, it should keep them extraterritorial, and help them make their case for future AAA status.

The move would also give them better access to shipping and logistics, more media companies to plaster Johnny Spinrad's latest exploits all over the world, another strong biotech firm, and a chance for Johnny to get his rush off the mountain and in the office with emerging market investment. Problems with this are going to come from a lot of angles. Other megacorps that he's going to pass or step into competition with will not sit back and watch him walk on by or just let him have his way. If NeoNET and SpIn were working on a deal, that could mean trouble for the number two AAA in the

world. Johnny's playing with fire, but then again, he's Johnny Spinrad—we'd expect nothing less.

Telestrian Industries has been around for a long time. They've been an AA for a long time. I would have expected them to sit back and let the audit come, having no fear of being downgraded. And that is exactly what they did—at first. When other AA- and A-rated corps started talking mergers to increase value, they quickly became aware of the precarious place left for a corp that does not take that route. This could be especially true if the Corporate Court changes requirements for AA status due to the actions taken by other megacorps. The same realization came to **Universal Omnitech** about the same time. The two AA-rated corps started discussing merger possibilities but had a lot of difficulties early on, including a considerable culture clash between Portland (I don't care what the elves call it) and Vancouver. Still in need of allies, UO reached out to **Pacific Rim Communications Unlimited**, a fomer-PPG-turned-ETC corp, and **Pacific Rim Bank & Financial Services**, a Japanacorp that was being left out of the Monobe group for some reason most likely involving honor. Telestrian made a similar effort but pulled in a black sheep that knew its days of holding onto its AA status were numbered, **KondOrchid**. With the realization that the pair had just created a megacorporate ring of headquarters around the Pacific, they came back together and have been working to settle their differences, hopefully before the audits start to hit. Even if they merge these five would never be able to agree on a name. The last documents I saw referred to the collaborative exploration as ***TIUOPRBPRCUKO***—a name fit only for financial documents, not for advertising.

- The mood within these can shift frequently and quickly. If one of the Big Ten makes a good enough offer, some of these "independents" might just sell out to get safely under their umbrella.
- Mr. Bonds

- The Big Ten could also end up shrinking back down to the Big Eight as they gobble up some of the small-fries on the CC in this feeding frenzy. Horizon has been a dwarf among giants since it slithered onto the CC, and things in Japan have been hot among the Japanacorps. They may decide it's time to restructure.
- Icarus

- If the Japanacorps do anything, it would be to find a way to expand and gain another seat on the CC to regain the power they used to have as five of the eight seats.
- Baka Dabora

The best part of all this for us is that we're seeing it early. If you hadn't noticed it early, then you're welcome for the insight. Remember all the hard work I've done and given away freely when it comes time to vote me back in. As runners, we have to figure out where all this is headed and plan how we're going to deal with it. Changes are coming, which is always the case; the trick is knowing how the winds are going to shift before they do.

From my point of view, what all of this seems to be leading towards is not just a weakening of the non-AAA corps but a chance for the Big Ten to devalue their rivals through this blatant abuse of the Corporate Court. The audit is an obvious attempt at weakening the smaller corps. This effort is going to set them up to be devoured by the bigger corps, both AA and AAA alike, but the AAA big boys will probably have a lot more buying power after the audits are done, since the AA corps are going to take a value hit.

Once everyone without a seat at the big table is devalued, the real fun begins. The AA-rated corps that have stretched themselves to buyout smaller corps will be the first targets as the AAAs, one or all, weaken the market area and force their competition toward losses. These struggling corps will be crushed and their remains will be quietly absorbed into the Big Ten. After dealing with the corps that went the buyout route, the Big Ten will go after any that managed to successfully merge. These new merged corps will have to be audited again and after we come in and start working our shadow magic in the interim, they will undoubtedly lose value during these new audits. Some will lose enough to get gobbled up by a AAA, others will weather that storm only to be attacked by the AAAs again, and some will see the writing on the wall and simply sign themselves over to a AAA they like, before they get dragged down by one they don't.

The end result is that the Big Ten become the Only Ten, and those at the top focus on exerting their power over the masses and fighting off the occasional bit of nosey shadowrunning from a rival to keep up appearances. We'll see a narrowing world of enclaves and corporate city-states that either tightly control the local national governments or simply disband them completely. We may complain that the megacorporations are powerful and soul-crushing, but we would be wishing for the current state of affairs if the Revision runs its course unopposed.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

There's been quite of bit of activity going on down in the Carib League. The work is spread wide and covers every type of op our kind pulls, but a wide-angle lens shows that most of the current work is landing in three main camps: issues for the Batistas, efforts against Seattle Governor Kenneth Brackhaven, and some whispering of a resurgent Komun'go with tempo ready for market. Only one of the three is what you'd expect to find here, but I think that's why the other two are focused down here. There are contracts on members of

all three camps and even a few being opened up by folks inside those camps to try and pull off some heat. The regular jobs are going both ways as well, and they stay closer to the streets.

The Batistas are still the criminals to know in Havana, but they've started to feel some pressure in the last month. Contracts are going out for targets across the organization, from soldatos to capos. The source is apparently softening the family for something, but I haven't been able to figure out who's calling the shots. The action seems street level, but the funding is definitely someone bigger, maybe a few someones. The whole thing seems a little off, since the Batistas have loyal guys who access these contract offers and have to be bringing warnings back.

The fact that they know isn't slowing their latest projects. They've had quite a bit of contact with their northern relatives, and word from these meetings is to show support for positive trade relationships between the UCAS, CAS, and Carib League, including Cuba. That means going beyond the status quo; the efforts are politically motivated and the families are hoping for extra results from Cuba thanks to their view on corporations. Success here will reveal itself longterm, but the immediate results seem apparent as the northern families have moved some additional ordnance and personnel down to the CL that is being put to use.

With the extra support, the Batistas are pushing at Zobop operations on Cuba and all around the CL. They're contracting some softening operations and hiring out for a lot of misdirection ops. The moves seem to be focused off Cuba right now, targeting other Zobop strongholds around the CL. It's an interesting little island war because the dead aren't necessarily out of the fight when it come to the Zobops, so the Batistas have special instructions for the work that comes across like a bad horror trid.

- This seems awfully bold. Cuba is not the kind of place that's going to tolerate a mob war. Tends to frighten the tourists.
- Traveler Jones

- All the more reason to stage hits around the rest of the Carib first. Stragglers and survivors are going to end up concentrated on Cuba. Once everyone is in one house, the Batistas knock down the house in a one hard strike. No long, drawn-out war to chase away the tourists.
- Kane
- The Zobops have way too many friends for the Batistas to take them out. Especially with the unique services only the Zobops can offer. There has to be something more.
- Thorn

While they go after the Zobops around the CL, on Cuba the Batistas are making friendly with the government by helping the local independent companies keep clear of the Revision and minimizing the risks of them losing that independence. Members of the Batista family have been avid patrons and visitors of local companies, especially when corporate meetings are taking place or when a well-known corporate executive happens to be stopping by for a chat. They aren't everywhere, but they can respond quickly to word from the eyes and ears they have all over town. If the threat is too big, they sometimes call in local teams if they're nearby.

This leads nicely to a connection to the Batistas, topic number one, and Kenneth Brackhaven, topic number two. I don't have the intel as to whether the move is a local choice or a decision of the Commission to cut ties, but the Batistas aren't protecting KB's assets around the CL, and Brackhaven Investments is having a rough month at the Havana offices. The family wasn't the only protection Brackhaven had—money buys a lot of friends—but it's one less group of friends he has in the Carib League.

Brackhaven's problem is that right now he needs all the friends down here he can get because his investments and holdings all over the Carib League are being targeted by his opposition, a group that is growing larger by the day. Key investment analysts within Brackhaven Investments have been running into frequent trouble on the streets of Havana and Santiago de Cuba where the company has their main offices. Problems have run from muggings to home invasions, and even include numerous assaults. As of yet, there have been no fatalities. Whichever of Brackhaven's enemies is coordinating these efforts wants chaos and disorder, not deaths. Dead employees can be replaced; scared employees tend to let their fear detract from their work for a while.

Also in the crosshairs is the real estate owned by BI all across the CL. Some of the attacks are direct, but most of the jobs are hitting or hurting BI-friendly real-estate brokers and nearby properties in order to affect property values. The owners of these other properties, sometimes rich individuals but often corporations disguising themselves with shell companies, are being clued in on the streets as to why their places are getting hit and Brackhaven is losing more and more support while building up some serious enemies who would rather see him take his business elsewhere. Since these jobs are focused on devaluing his holdings, I'd guess they may stop as soon as Brackhaven Investments has their audit with the Corporate Court.

- The audit is going to be the least of Brackhaven's worries very soon. One of the recent jobs was a home invasion on a property near Mantua. The team that was hired did the recon and felt they could subcontract cheap to some locals and walk away with the cash and no risk. Locals were overexuberant in their efforts to impress the runners and botched the job. They went in while the family was there and ended up killing four people. Among the dead were Capo Juan-Juan Vasquez's daughter and his five-year-old grandson. While Juan is definitely going to go after whoever was behind the jobs, he'll also be going after Brackhaven for bringing these troubles to his island.
- Traveler Jones

All of this isn't because of Brackhaven's troubles back in Seattle but because of his ever-emerging ties to the Human Nation. While the public is likely to never see any of that, the shadows are hot with jobs all over North America uncovering those ties, which are closer and more active than any of Brackhaven's enemies dreamed. One particular revelation that recently emerged is an island investment that will surprise many, both for its connection to Brackhaven and the fact that it keeps popping up.

Meanwhile, just when people were starting to forget about tempo, it's re-emerging. While the huge ring may have been broken up, the drug is still popping up in sprawls across the globe, and prices are through the roof. Keen to make money, a very unlikely alliance formed between Chulsoon Gray Wolf and Brackhaven Investments. BI owns a series of plantations, all in very out-of-the-way locations, across the Carib League. The money has been going in, but nothing has yet been produced. On paper, the plantations are producing coffee and grapes. Both are then supposed to be aged and prepared, turned to wine, roasted, and anything else they can list on paper to show a delay in release for sale in order to continue the charade. My suspicion is that Gray Wolf, who has been spotted visiting all of these plantations, still knows the secrets of tempo and is working with BI to make a big profit on its return. Gray Wolf also has quite a few former members of the Komun'go working with him as his closest lieutenants. The last part of the puzzle, which seems to be what they are currently solving with visits to a wide array of captains and corporate executives, is distribution. With KondOrchid no longer an option, they'll need a new way to get their product to market. And they'll need a very quiet shipper before they flood the streets.

- The cartels that had been involved in tempo still control production, but something has been keeping them from moving forward in a large way. Something has to be really bad for the cartels to be willing to hold off on making a freighter-full of money.
- Balladeer
- Unless, of course, this is how they're doing it. With an arms-length approach and some former allies.
- Red Anya

- Not likely. This is just one of those times where history repeats itself because everyone does a really good job of keeping secrets.
- Frosty

NEXT BIG INITIATIVE OF DANIELLE DE LA MAR

With a newer and more secure Matrix now in place (insert laugh track here), some would have expected Danielle de la Mar to simply bask in the glory and rake in the dough from trid appearances all over the world, along with her nice, fat Corporate Court paycheck. Anyone who hasn't been living under a rock or out in the middle of Puyallup, though, knows this isn't the case. Instead, she is on to her next agenda of increased security in the world. Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, get ready for the next wave of megacorporate cooperation headed up by the Corporate Court: the Universal SIN Registry.

While SINs are already a global system, over time the various backups, supports, and infrastructure for SIN validation have become scattered across systems all around the world. Nations and megacorporations able to issue SINs host their own data and limit access to outside sources for obvious reasons. The more access one allows, the better chance of a system being exploited. If everyone put all their SIN data in one place, it would have been a nightmare for Matrix security, and hackers couldn't have dreamed up a better way to make money if they tried. But that was on the old system. The "IC Queen," as many have begun calling de la Mar, is claiming that the new Matrix could handle this kind of operation, allowing GOD to expand and monitor all the SINs of the world. She's pushing for the CC and the most powerful governments around the world to quickly ratify a new SIN registry so that data can begin to be correlated. That's bad news for the shadows.

In their first pass, they will flag any SINs that contain overlapping biometric data between individuals. The next pass will use facial software, followed by visual inspection and in-person communication. After that it's going to be random verifications and assignment of SINs to those who do not have one. These Outsider SINs will be issued by the Corporate Court on the spot to anyone found not possessing a National, Criminal, or Corporate SIN. Information on this OSIN will of course be shared throughout the system, allowing the individual to be tracked without giving them any actual benefits of citizenship that would typically come with a SIN. The goal, of course, would be for this centralized system to have all SIN-related data, including a full genome sequence on record.

- This will be interesting. What will the megacorporations be doing with the genome data of every sapient citizen on Earth? They'll also need to solve the issue of sapient citizenship, too. Not every nation and megacorporation have the same rules for citizenship, especially when it comes to metasapients. This registry will need to get past that issue first.
- Goatfoot

- That's easy. The same way they handle it right now. Extraterritoriality. Having a SIN doesn't give you any rights within a megacorp or country, it just means they have a way of verifying who you are. If you're a ghoul on Evo soil, you're good. Step off into the UCAS, and you're on your own.
- Hannibelle

- It's not that bad. I'm sure the CC's need to expand will result in hiring a few opportunistic individuals who will be more than willing to slip some data of varying levels of accuracy into the system for the right price.
- Kane

This is going to open up some opportunities in the shadows for professionals of significant skill. Hacking the GOD host where this data will be stored is probably not going to be within the realm of possibility for a while. That means fake SINs are going to start collapsing once this gets rolling, and the new SINs are going to be tight. Professionals, especially those good at making people disappear, are going to be in high demand to create SIN vacancies that can be used. These won't last long if used while engaged in criminal enterprises, but it might be the best solution we have early on.

But we don't just want work on the back end, do we? We have this place so we can get out ahead of our problems when we have the chance. We're going to do that by getting between de la Mar and those in positions of power, including removing some of those that she is relying on to help push her agenda. She has several key figures in most of the major national governments who we can manipulate. On the megacorporate side, we're not going to have a lot of luck in killing off those in power, but we can put pressure on them or their families and get them to slow the process. Since the megas are the CC and this is a top-down call, it's going to be an uphill fight. But, then again, when is it not from inside the shadows.

As another sign of my goodwill I'm dropping the names into the hands of an ally. He's not a JackPointer, but you all know him and have let him post on here be-

fore. If you're looking for info on how to help this situation, talk to Ire; he's got the datafile.

- The fight against this may not be as tough as it might seem at first. The new Matrix passed because it meshed well with corporate interests. This vast SIN registry? Not so much. There are plenty of corp execs and managers out there with extra SINs for a wide variety of purposes, and they would not be too eager to lose their fakes. On top of that, the corps *like* the fact that people like us cannot be tracked easily. That's one of the reasons they turn to us. They're not going to give that up without a fight. For once, the corps and shadows may be aligned. So if you need support in bringing de la Mar's proposal down, head to your local corporate department of unspecified services.
- Sunshine

- I love that Riser's goodwill is a list of names of people who should be killed. Seems the old Riser is alive in there somewhere.
- Kane

- I'll say what some of us might be, and should be, thinking. What if all these hit lists are just Riser's own personal agenda that we're executing for him? This could all be a head case manipulation.
- Plan 9

- Might have been better if someone other than the head case conspiracy nut made a comment about a head case conspiracy. That doesn't make the comment less valid, it just makes one wonder if one head case is trying to throw people off the scent or sabotage another head case. Or are you both Monads now?
- /dev/grrl

THE "D" WORD

I'm not a spreader of idle rumor. I like to make sure anything I put out there, even if it is a rumor, is confirmed by several sources that I'm fairly certain don't gather data from the same rumor mill. That said, I'm putting this out there with only a few sources, one of which is a datadump from inside Boston.

Deus is back. I hate to say that I've heard its name again, but I have. Though it is seemingly contained, it still causes me worry. Because anything to do with that corrupted chunk of data is bad news, even if it is trapped. By "trapped," I mean stuck within the NEMAQZ, the quarantine area around Boston that the megas are keeping locked up tight. I'm sure the megacorps are aware of this, and even if only Renraku knew they'd surely keep the lid on until they could find a way to destroy that corrupted code once and for all.

But Deus is not the "D" word I'm referring to here. It's part of it, since the "D" I'm talking about stands for dissonance. I started with the mention of Deus, because on the outside of the wall there are forces gathering in support of Deus that happen to worship dissonance, and they are working to corrupt hosts, devices, and AIs in support of creating dissonance wells that they can use to create a way for Deus to cross the transmission dead-zone around Boston. Many of these groups are working around the rest of the East Coast and around the QZ, but operations as far away as Tsimshian and the UK have been tied to this.

While I'm not about to continue to push the technomancer scare agenda any more than I'm going to tell everyone to fear the head cases, I am going to warn about those technomancers who follow a different path, just like I'd warn against the head cases who are psychotic. I don't know the limits to the power of resonance or dissonance or even what they are exactly, but I know technomancers that have taken jaunts to the "Resonance Realms" in their digital form, and they tell me there isn't one specific spot to get in from. Sometimes there is, but most of the time they go in wherever and pop out wherever too. Now, there are enough wackos who believe they can use Dissonance for the same thing and that they can open up a way for Deus, who is nothing but a digital personality, to step out of the QZ, where someone let his crazy hoop loose and out into the rest of the Matrix. Not my idea of a good day.

I'm not savvy in this department. Here I'm just being Paul Revere and warning all that "The Deus is coming, the Deus in coming." Now, all of you deck-jockey patriots can do the rest.

- I wonder how Deus would handle the new protocols. Maybe GOD would drop him like a hot potato as soon as he pops up?
- /dev/grrl

- We couldn't be so lucky. And knowing GOD, they'd try and capture him so they can study him, and then somehow make him more powerful and mess up more people's lives. Bad enough I'm starting to think of inside Boston like another Renraku Arcology. Hate to see what kind of continental or global frag-up the CC could do with this.
- Bull

NOT ON YOUR RADAR

Now for a warning. I'm not sure if it is a lack of attention, an undeserved level of trust, or just plain ignorance that has lead to this interesting situation. No matter the reason, I've recently come across some rather disturbing information about a group of individuals that will probably incite a large amount of denial from those who are reading this report. Part of this will be personal, and part will be professional because I've discovered something before those here were aware. For those who take the following personally, I apologize for being the bearer of bad news, but take it seriously and keep your eyes and ears open. You'll see it eventually.

JACKPOINTERS

DATALINK...ESTABLISHING CONNECTION...

Name: Slamm-0!
Value: $$$
Suspected Initiator: Tabby
Current Contractor Count: 2

Name: Axis Mundi
Value: $$
Suspected Initiator: Kludge
Current Contractor Count: 1

Name: Glitch
Value: $$$$
Suspected Initiator: Casanova
Current Contractor Count: 4

Name: Pistons
Value: $$
Suspected Initiator: Casanova
Current Contractor Count: 2

Name: Bull
Value: $$$$
Suspected Initiator: Casanova
Current Contractor Count: 6

Name: Sunshine
Value: $$$$$
Suspected Initiator: Unknown
Current Contractor Count: 4

Name: Mika
Value: $$
Suspected Initiator: Unknown
Current Contractor Count: 3

Name: Winterhawk
Value: $$$$$
Suspected Initiator: Kludge
Current Contractor Count: 2

Name: Frosty
Value: $$$
Suspected Initiator: Unknown
Current Contractor Count: 2

Name: Kay St. Irregular
Value: $$$
Suspected Initiator: Tabby
Current Contractor Count: 2

- So at least we know Tabby, Kludge, and Casanova are suspects. I wonder how many others?
- /dev/grrl

- Do those names look familiar? Like maybe the ones who were involved in the chat at the end of the Storm Front upload?
- Frosty

To the professionals who don't like getting scooped by some head case, know that I only discovered this within the last month. Also, I've only unwoven the complex tapestry of this intricate plot because I have more time on my hands than any ten other members of the JP crew combined, and I'm one mind with all the info. I had the time, resources, and access to do this job. While I usually find the machinations and interactions between non-corporate interests to be a bit blunt, I've found this one to have all the necessary intrigue of an old-fashioned spy novel. From what I'm seeing it's like a chess game where both sides will play their pieces with skill and finesse right up until some asshole flips the board and everything goes crazy.

I've written enough metaphors and hopefully gained enough interest for you to read past the next sentence. JackPoint is under attack. I don't say that as if I am the grand protector of all things, but instead because I feel as if I can help. I've identified the attackers and none of it makes sense on the surface. But some serious digging and making a few strained, but verifiable, connections, I'm certain that the most well-known members of JackPoint are currently being targeted by members of, or a coalition within, the Denver Nexus.

- I cleared out the series of variations on "bulldrek" messages. Stop them now.
- Bull

I know that is hard to believe. For years the members of these shadow networks have worked together, but all of that personal drek is being put aside for this move. Members of the Nexus are using proxies to set up contracts on at least a dozen members of JP. Contracts on members of JP are normal. Clockwork has had a price on his head since about five minutes after he first posted, and Rigger X has several open on him at any one time. The values aren't enough for most hitters to make a run at these guys because of their connections in high places and the fact that they both have solid enough skills to make the operation non-profitable. These latest contracts are backed with better cash and a trio of burner SINs to get clear of the backlash. When I inquired, they also offered a yearlong access ID to the Nexus to sweeten the deal. At first I thought it was just because whoever it was knew my relationship status with JP and wanted to offer me a datahaven to work from. The offer got me curious so I started on the contract. When another JP member contract came up I inquired again, but this time through a proxy because the network I was using doesn't issue multiple jobs to a single contractor. You have to close out before you can snag the next contract. The proxy got another good job offer and the same bonus option, access to the Nexus.

I've proxied and connected with other professionals to verify there are a dozen jobs with similar offers. Each has a different contract, and all of the legwork leads back to a solid foundation for the work. They're doing their

homework or planting the right stories to make it look like a hit is justifiable. Not that hitmen need justification other than a contract, but these are members of the shadow community so a little more than money is often needed to get past the thieves code. Here's where clue two came in that made me certain something was off.

The contract on Slamm-0! was supported by a supposed datasteal against NeoNET that occurred at a time when I know Slamm-0! wasn't hacking anything because he was playing dad while Netcat was out of town and the kid was being a holy terror. It was a likely job at a likely time. It fit all the standard Slamm-0! telltales, but no one checked out whether he was otherwise engaged at the time. Once I knew something was off in one story, I started finding the rest of the problems.

- How'd you know about me and the kid?
- Slamm-0!

- He was likely watching you for the contract on your son. It's quite valuable.
- Balladeer

- *What*?!
- Netcat

- There's an old, but still open contract on your child. It isn't very high-paying and requires physical confirmation so there are extra strings. It currently has two active contractors. Just a heads up.
- Balladeer

- I know you're young and desire to impress and connect, Balladeer, but do not use information from private locations again or I will be sure to inform others of your indiscretions. That place exists for the use of its supporters. While Riser has decided here to mention things that should not be shared, he is scared and on the run. Unless you wish to join him, use more discretion.
- Thorn

I'll attach a little data file to upload with who's on the list and any other pertinent info I've put together. I stretched my resources thin getting this much, so don't consider is comprehensive. There may be other members of JP with a target on their back.

The reason for this clandestine assault isn't in my data. I have a few speculations on it, though, and while I won't be collecting on any of the contracts in order to follow the rules of JP even while I await reinstatement, I'm also not digging much further. If something comes past my sights, I'll freely inform those it concerns, but my efforts without incentive stop here.

It's time to speculate. There are two big powers in Denver right now that could be putting pressure on members of the Nexus to undermine JackPoint as a method of halting the flow of information. We have provided a lot of exposure for the happenings in Denver. While painting our rather vivid picture, we used a broad brush that didn't show favor to any of the parties involved. That means a very powerful elf and dragon both got a little smeared by JackPoint. I'm not a fan of meddling in the affairs of dragons, or elves who can go toe-to-toe with dragons, so my experience is limited, but I know neither of those forces like people to expose their misdeeds.

If anyone was to dig further into this, I'd look to those two camps as the ones putting pressure on members of the Nexus. In case any of the newer members here are thinking of reaching out, remember that the members of the Nexus may not be doing this voluntarily and you could be risking a lot of lives, including yours, theirs, and possibly their loved ones, by asking direct questions.

- How did we miss this? And did we? Anyone avoided any attacks lately?
- Hard Exit

- Yes, but I didn't know it was tied to anything about the rest of you. If no one else has seen attacks, that could just mean they are being patient. I will be looking into this. We should not be warring amongst ourselves while there are greater troubles to worry about.
- Winterhawk

- That could very well be the reason. We aren't as powerful as megacorporations, but any one of us could do some serious damage to the rep or life of a lot of corpses. Maybe they're looking to trim down the bushes by taking off the leaves and branches at the top.
- Glitch

PACIFYING THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

While that little title might sound like it belongs in a text talking about the nineteenth-century American movement westward, this pacification is even more nefarious. While some might not think that is even possible let me start by mentioning the two big players, the Human Nation and the Black Lodge. Think it's possible now.

Thanks to a mutual enemy that has been aggressive in recent years, these two groups have connected at a few spots. While the Human Nation may not be completely keen on the Awakened and the Black Lodge really only hates elves as a race and has members of the other metatypes, the two groups are overlooking those differences in order to accomplish two very serious goals together. They are looking to destroy Tír Tairngire and the Ork Underground.

Neither of these organizations is the "roll in the jackbooted thugs" type. We won't see a ground war with hu-

man soldiers stomping in and floating hooded wizards lobbing fireballs from these two groups. Their plan is far more insidious. From my vantage point I've gleaned some of the underlying work, but most of what I'm privy to is the wetwork they use to clear difficult obstacles.

I'm probably going too fast. Let's ease back a little.

Both of these groups have been targeted by the various great dragons during their scuffle with humanity. Since a cease fire was called, those aggressions have slid deeper into the shadows. The problem with doing that is you end up in very dark places where the people you hire are often less concerned about making a deal with a dragon and more concerned about making money to work on whatever minuscule connection to sanity they still have. That means they will sell out to a higher bidder, and while the dragons have plenty of cash to settle scores, most of them know that when a dragon offers an exorbitant sum of money for a job, no one is going to take it because they fear being eaten instead of paid. That means the jobs pay enough that the wealthy members of the Black Lodge (BL) and Human Nation (HN) can buy their way free and get a heads-up on who put out the job. This leads them to all start running into the same individuals getting hired to do jobs against both groups, which in turn leads to the members of both groups meeting in some fortuitous way. This has brought pieces of these two groups close, giving us our current situation.

The two organizations are coordinating their efforts to reshape the Pacific Northwest, but the work they are doing is going on across North America. BL efforts in DeeCee include pushing the UCAS federal government to overturn the redistricting vote in Seattle, offering military support to the California Free State should the fallout from Hestaby's exile cause problems in Tír Tairngire, working to try and smooth border relations between the UCAS and the Sioux Nation to reduce border stress and allow the Sioux to look elsewhere for fights to pick, and quietly supporting the rights of Aztlan to keep their sector in Denver under a new treaty, therefore stalling the process.

In Denver the HN is fueling the fires of revolution in order to keep the area unstable and hinder work on negotiating a new Treaty of Denver. Their efforts often fall on the operational border between assassins and mercenaries out to blow up the world. The key is they aren't subtle, don't care for either of the sides, and happily support either side spilling the blood of the other. The HN here also have a larger-than-normal number of Flaming Swords, their militant hand. While most cities with a significant HN presence might have up to a dozen of these psychopathic genocidal maniacs, Denver has three dozen confirmed members and another dozen on my "maybe" list. They're spread around the different sectors, with the bulk hiding out in the reclaimed Aztlan Sector.

The BL has members throughout western North America and has been reaching out to them frequently over the last year or so. There's no surprise that the work seems to be focused in the realm of politics. With BL members hidden in almost every government west of the Mississippi, they appear to be sewing the seeds of distrust for the Tír. Not that many of these nations needed more reason to distrust the elves, but the BL efforts are pushing the various governments toward open hostility. Though they don't usually go through official professional channels, the BL has been contracting heavily in the area of "wax"work, which are wetwork jobs that have blatant misdirection with an obvious focus in the contract. It's like the exotic German sniper rifle someone used to off Hestaby's top shaman, that pointed immediately (too obviously, to some) toward Lofwyr. This technique, along with political pressure, blackmail, arcane mental manipulation, and a slew of other dirty tricks are being used to rile up the NAN, CFS, and Tír Tairngire to get into a scuffle.

The HN is rumored to have purchased control of the various contractors in charge of inspecting and restructuring the Ork Underground now that it is an official district of Seattle. Anyone want to take a guess at how bad that could turn out? While the obvious thought would be the collapse of places to kill the metahumans below, that might also affect the city above and all of its nice human occupants. A pleasant fellow I used to work with came across some city planning schematics that had a lot more file protection than one would expect. After he cracked them I got a look, and while I don't have a civil engineering degree, what I do have is an immeasurable IQ. I saw that the plans seem to show a way to completely trash the air throughout the Ork Underground with a small accident—an accident easily facilitated by a small team of trained monkeys or members of the Crimson Crush.

While I'm keen on making sure the shadows are informed on this, I'm more interested in the shadows actually doing something useful with this information. We can dig and look into who's paying the tab for our jobs, but that's not enough with these guys. This is genocide, and while the old Riser might have shrugged his shoulders and said, "more chaos, more cash", that wasn't what he really felt. He wanted a settled-down world. Problem is, with groups like this around sometimes the only way to make a settled world is to put a few of the chaos creators in the ground.

So what am I going to do about it? Well, I'm dropping a file straight to Bull on what I know is going on in the Seattle area. I know he's busy with the Underground, but if he wants the new district to survive, he'll need to reach out into the shadows to get some work done. I'm not sure of connections in Denver, so that place may need to handle its own demons. I'm trusting an upstanding troll, name of Nuum, down in the CFS. Runs a nursery (the plant kind, though he sells mostly plastic ones) in NorCal where he also operates a healthy trade in telesma, arms, and drugs, when he's not working as a fixer for the

West Coast shadows. Lastly, I'm sending a file to a t-bird jammer named Sleipner who runs a circuit through the NAN lands and up and down the Rockies. I think those three could give the BL and HN enough troubles to keep things from spiraling out of control.

- It should be noted somewhere that all of this is being done by *members* of each group, not the group itself. In fact, the cooperation between these two groups is far from universal, and factions within both organizations are not happy about what their fellow members are doing. While I haven't seen any direct interference, I have seen back-end work that ties up loose ends in a rather bloody fashion.
- Balladeer

- Bull, did you get the file? What's the scoop?
- Sunshine

- I will neither confirm nor deny the receipt of any files from a criminal third party.
- Bull

- Well said Mr. Politics! Now spill it.
- Slamm-0!

- I've got the data. Heavy stuff. I'll be handling it with care and avoiding open discussion. You want a piece of the action, PM me.
- Bull

WHILE NO ONE WAS LOOKING

A lot of small things happen while people aren't looking, but it is a rare occurrence that something this large stays completely under the radar. The megacorps' ability to keep things bottled up is increasing, and that should bother us all. While we've been busy paying attention to the Monads and their efforts out on Gagarin, Saeder-Krupp has managed to anchor the asteroid they brought in for the space elevator. The public announcement hasn't been made by Saeder-Krupp as they're still running tests, but they have had the space elevator up and running since August and not a peep about it has been heard anywhere.

- Finally we get him lying. That's a load. I've got eyes all over the platform. Nothing's happening.
- Kane

- He's telling chip-truth. I just took a look, and the Earth has a new geosynchronous mini-moon. How did we miss this?
- Icarus

- Who's right? Kane or Icarus?
- Mika

- Could the Monad thing be an S-K ploy? Are they keeping everyone's attention elsewhere to keep them from noticing this?
- /dev/grrl

S-K appears to be waiting for the right moment and keeping this quiet while the Monad issue plays out. The elevator hasn't been idle, though. The dragon has been moving shipments up the cables (yes, plural) from a platform in the middle of the central Atlantic. The location is about eighteen degrees west longitude, right above the Mid-Atlantic Ridge at the Romanche Gap, the third deepest trench in the Atlantic. This is also one of the Atlantic's most sea-mountainous regions. This isn't where it was originally planned, and the platform being constructed—and expanded—at the original location is still in operation, and growing.

- Looks like both Kane and Icarus were right and wrong. Could they be building two? Also ... guys, can you read through once and *then* comment? I hate going back and deleting these posts that get answered half a dozen lines later. I'm leaving that one because Kane admitted to having eyes on the other platform. In case anyone needs info, they know who to ask.
- Slamm-0!

The big change staying a secret seems to be all about security at the new platform. A great way to keep rumors from getting out is to use personnel who fear their employer as one would fear a dragon. Because their employer, and the immediate security, is being provided by a dragon—the Sea Dragon to be exact. Those mountains I mentioned have a lair we didn't know about when the *Clutch of Dragons* datafile was put together, and the Sea Dragon has quite a force there. If I were to believe all the materials I've read she even has other leviathans in the region. Possibly the offspring from the eggs we were discussing. That is pure speculation, but I'm sure someone at JP would have made a comment of a similar nature.

This is going to quickly become a hotspot for jobs. First, to find out what S-K is sending up during their "testing" and whether it has something to do with the Monads. Second, to try to get some early intel on the project for other megas that probably aren't too happy the platform got moved. Third, and probably with the largest number of jobs, will be smaller corps looking for intel and crazies attempting to sabotage the place. Careful what work you take.

The facility itself is already a small floating city with far more below the surface than above—and there's quite a bit above. The surface consists of thirty docking

ports for ships of various sizes, a dozen landing pads for VTOL craft, a trio of airstrips large enough to land anything under semiballistic size, the four warehouse stations at the corners for the four elevator pods, and a central "city" consisting of half a dozen twenty-story towers and a central thirty-story tower. The best feature I've seen in the documents I've read is that the entire facility can submerge. Yes, the whole place can sink over a hundred meters to protect itself from storms at sea.

Below the surface is a massive aquacology that extends down to almost three hundred meters. The facility appears to be an upside-down, round-edged, stepped pyramid down to about one hundred meters below the surface. At the peak of the pyramid are quartet of shafts that lead down to pods that become smaller and smaller as they go deeper. The plans I saw weren't specific, providing only a general layout, but they looked like they were modular and new pods could be added at various depths. I'm sure everything below the one hundred meter mark is all experimental labs or top-secret stuff. In truth, it might not even be down there yet. The schematic data I analyzed contained only plans. The surface facility is there, though, and the elevators are operational.

CFD ON THE STREETS

On a truly street level, I'd like to drop a few updates I picked up during my extensive free time after getting riffed, post *Storm Front*. I spitefully found a way to get my hands on a copy of the section of *Storm Front* I was blocked from, as well as that *Stolen Souls* download. Reading the little bits and pieces that were dropped on several of the CFD affected folks seemed like a great way to spend my time while I was trying to convince the first Riser that we could get along. It was an interesting time back then, as it was very early in the days of CFD. These groups have now been infected and active for longer than most shadowrunners' careers. They've had quite the run.

I've kept an eye out for the remains of the Society of the Phoenix Arisen, and much as one would expect from a group of this name, they once again rose from the ashes. They slipped over to CalFree and set up in a small ghost town in NorCal far enough away from everyone else that no one really noticed. It's close enough to the border of both the Tír and PCC for the Society to interact and draw from all three populations. Their numbers grew throughout '75 as more and more head cases, all former Awakened, joined their ranks to be taught how to harness the power of mana.

They had a wild celebration on New Year's Day 2076 commemorating their latest rebirth and sacrificed all the members of the group who had not been able to regain their arcane potential. During the subsequent year, they did another round of rebuilding, though their numbers didn't grow as much thanks to the rumors about the New Year's Day celebration. Though their numbers didn't grow exponentially, their income did. The group started to spread its wings and has made a name for themselves in transportation protection, smuggling, and most of all talislegging. Their rather unique combination of abilities makes them really good at covering all the bases.

What all this growth and money making has not done is keep them off the radar. Other, more longstanding, operations in the area were fine with them doing a little talislegging and running the border with some goods every once in awhile, but when they started branching out into the territory of the local go-gangs, which some old-timers call MCs (for motorcycle clubs), they found more serious opposition. The Society is tough and full of head cases, but so are the local gangs. It doesn't help that their talislegging activities have recently come up on the radar of the PCC and they're starting to catch heat from several sides. Though heat isn't really an issue for a Phoenix. The '77 New Year's party was a big success and they didn't lose anyone, though several members left on a smuggling run right before and haven't returned.

- The members that left weren't incapable of casting—the failures had left long before New Year's. The group that didn't come back settled on the other side of the border in the PCC. And then threw their own party. They're expanding.
- Arete

Despite the occasional efforts of Kane and the Aztlan Navy, the group now known as Torredo's Rays is thriving in the waters surrounding Corpus Christie, Aztlan. Torredo and his gang of smugglers have grown in the past year as they've enhanced their connections around the Gulf Run. Corpus Christie in Aztlan, Mérida in Yucatán, La Habana in the Caribbean League, and New Orleans and Tampa in the CAS are the four main ports of the Gulf Run and each now has its own personal Torredo. Same build, same voice, same face, and some say, same mind. We all know how that may have come about, but to oth-

ers it's a sign of the true Torredo's power. No one knows which Torredo is the original Torredo, and they all claim to be the one.

The group is chased by the Navies of both the CAS and Aztlan, yet they gain protection and information by smuggling for Aztechnology, the CAS government, the new government of Yucatán, and Cuba, along with anyone else who can pay. They tend to avoid open conflict, but most of their smuggling ships are armed or escorted by armed craft. Some even have small, armed jet skis to deploy as a defense with pilots who are willing to use the craft as torpedoes. They aren't usually violent since they understand that draws undue attention, but they also know that portraying strength keeps lesser gangs from trying to overtake their position. This new strong stance is a good change for everyone else involved since on the way up the method was assimilation.

Torredo may have made several versions of himself, but he also attracted several other head case identities that have also spread their ranks. Along with the rumors of the Torredos being able to communicate telepathically, the same rumors abound about the other head case identities, many of whom choose the same name. Odds are what the streets call telepathy is simply related to the fact that the head cases are walking commlinks. They can send and receive data to each other like any other commlink. I wonder if you all knew that. Maybe I should give an insider view of being a head case. Another time.

Currently Torredo is dealing with pressure in New Orleans and Mérida. In New Orleans they are fending off both the local crime syndicates and law enforcement. Both groups are pushing back at the expanding criminal enterprise and trying to keep the smugglers in check as they move large amounts of contraband into the CAS while providing a route for metahuman trafficking of citizens from all over North America. In Mérida they're feeling pressure from the Yucatán government as it tries to make itself appear strong against criminals. Problem is that same government funded and supported so many smugglers during their rebellion that they are having trouble turning their back on the people who helped them. Many of those smugglers have developed legitimate shipping contracts and businesses, but Torredo is not among those. These legitimized smugglers are also targeting Torredo by providing information on the Ray's comings and goings. The conflict has become violent recently and will probably get worse before it gets better.

One last unsettled situation that I'll cover before I wrap this up and send it all off in a compact little data-package is the issues that arose between Cavalier Arms, the Mojave Rattlers, NeoNET, and Nightengale Clinics. Lanier's cerebral co-passenger is a deviously intelligent sentience. After the weapons failure, most of the Rattlers went in for surgery, and over ninety percent of the team members had some kind of augmentation system installed after the catastrophe in '73. Those systems and the procedures that followed, combined with the residual nanites that were left from the damaged weapons opened the Rattlers up to CFD. Any team members who didn't go head case after the surgeries were infected during the practice and rehabilitation events.

Since then the entire team has undergone several other implant surgeries and is now the most wired team in Desert Wars and the top contender, by a large margin, for the title this year. They've racked up several records over the last few seasons and have set a new standard for coordinated tactics. And we all know why. While their sponsors don't know at an employee level, the higher-ups most certainly do by this point. That's why contracts exist for almost every member of the team that led back to NeoNET virtually every time.

On the corporate side, the sponsors are making way too much off these guys to back out, and Cavalier field-tested almost a dozen new designs last season alone. The Rattlers are making a big name for themselves, and it's all because they're a bunch of head cases.

That's everything. I have a lot more data and a desire to share, but I'd like some assurances that only membership provides. I know I made enemies. We all do. What I have to offer is worth having my snarky attitude back around. I know you missed me.

- I'd offer him a shot. And I despise him.
- Balladeer

- I'd second both those statements.
- Lyran

- Damn. You guys read too fast. I didn't get down here to make the first comment. It will be the last, though. We will not be voting on Riser's return. This is not because I'm some horrible dictator who hates him and doesn't want him around. It's because this information was handed over in a face-to-face with Rigger X, who Riser thought he could trust, and really should have known better. He sold him out to the Smoker's Club.
- Glitch

...AND DESPERATE MEASURES

"Good afternoon, thank you for contacting Neutral Ground. How can we be of service today?"

The voice on the other end of the call was far more chipper than he expected in a place like this, but then again it wasn't everyday you made a phone call to a place like this, or talked to people like these. Or at least it wasn't for him.

"I'd like to arrange for some work." His voice cracked as he spoke, but the person on the other end of the line didn't miss a beat.

"Excellent sir. We offer a wide array of services. My second question is which department would you like to speak with?"

His confusion at the question did not reduce his awkwardness. "What departments do you have?" he asked.

"I'm sorry. Neutral Ground is a primary host for two separately operating coordination systems with polar opposite operating parameters. What kind of service did you need today?"

He was less confused now. He could at least understand what the two "polar opposite operating parameters" were based on what he was calling for, but he wasn't sure about the best way to put what he wanted into words. Was this a secure line where he could simply be direct? Was there a code? Some lingo he was supposed to get from the contact that directed him here?

"I need to cancel a contract." He tried to sound sly but in truth felt like a fish gasping for breath on the deck of a boat.

"Oh, I see. I apologize, your comm number didn't open your registration. What was your handler identification?"

"Handler identification? I don't have one. Was I supposed to get one from Sla ...?" His increasing confusion was thankfully interrupted before he could fumble out critical information.

"No names, sir. I think I understand the issue here. You have not contacted us before and need to go through a few steps first. I presume by your use of 'cancel' you are seeking our termination services. We're going to need to set you up with an account. First, what would you like your handler name to be?"

The pleasant tone never wavered as it reviewed termination services, as if it was the same as ordering a soykaf at Soybucks. He hadn't thought of a cool name to give himself, and he'd be damned if he was going to get some generic number/letter code slapped on him.

"Enigma," he finally said with some confidence.

"Excellent, though we'll need numbers. We always do. You are our first Enigma if you would like the number one, though this means you have a vast array of options to choose from. No more that ten numbers please."

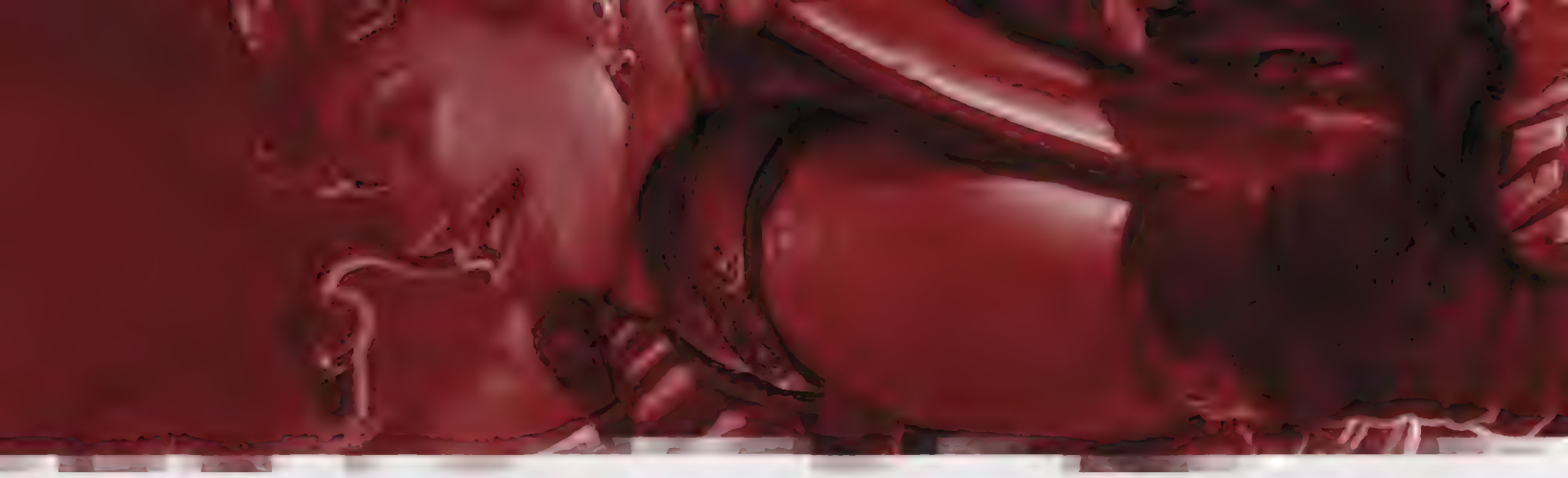
Again he wracked his brain but ended with something simple.

"Zero-zero-one."

"Excellent, Enigma zero-zero-one. I have the comm you are calling from and a handler name. Next we will need to set up the payment account."

Confusion rapidly faded, and the rest of the process was remarkably smooth. After only twenty-five minutes, he had set up everything he needed and lined up his first contract.

Who knew having someone killed could be so streamlined?



IN THE CROSSHAIRS

POSTED BY: GLITCH

I'm not a proponent of killing, but I know in our line of work it happens. Sometimes it happens as a result of a plan gone wrong, but it's probably better when it happens as part of a plan gone right, and it only involves the target a single bullet, spell, bomb, code, or what have you was intended for, rather than something more indiscriminate. Wetwork is part of the shadows. We "shoot people in the face for money," as the saying goes. Though the "wet" in wetwork is often thought of as the blood we spill, I've often thought of it as describing the slippery slope that those who involve themselves in these dark dealings must traverse. Hiring a contract killer is just as unlawful as carrying out the contract. Both sides need a measure of anonymity but also a measure of trust. The people doing the hiring need to know they are going to get someone who will get the job done. The people being hired need to know that whoever is choosing the mark will pay. There've been systems for this type of thing in place for millennia, some of which are still in place. The newest of these is a Matrix host maintained by Neutral. Along with granting us the needed codes to direct our brightest killers there, I talked Neutral into letting us have a little sneak peak of what data is on there. As any good negotiator does, he countered with a desire to provide a little intro to his two hosts. I agreed. Here's the compiled info—the intro data from Neutral followed by a decent selection of jobs they have posted from both sides. After all that, I touched a couple of street-level folks to give us a look at how one goes about these same activities on the streets. Read on and comment away.

NEUTRAL GROUND

POSTED BY: NEUTRAL

I'm done contracting out to Johnsons and getting them killed. And then having the next Mr. Johnson want a bigger cut or more cash to be the go-between. For that, I've created a rather unique pair of hosts where registered members can go to evaluate and accept contracts for both sides of the assassination game. Access to membership at **The Hidden Blades** was given to all members of the major guilds, the heads of the criminal syndicates, several well-known prime contractors including Teachdaire, a number of non-corporate affiliated dragons, and the System Admins of shadow VPNs around the world. Access to **The Unwavering Shield** is open to anyone willing to register an ID. Access to The Hidden Blades is limited to those who deserve it. I'm sure someone will use knowledge of the site to gain leverage somewhere, so each request for access will come with some biometric or other security measure. We're likely to change up security protocols frequently as well, and you can guarantee the IC here will be as black as a moonless sky.

Using these sites will be easy. Simply log on, access available jobs, find matches based on the basic descriptions, and the known job information will become accessible. The data is read-only so it can't be copied and transferred out to others. Not that someone can't just give the word to anyone else—it happens—but sharing the data with the wrong people and getting caught results in the opening of a contract on the user, but no denial of access.

- That's because they use the access to find out where the user is and start adding that data to the file. Be wary.
- Thorn

The two sites have similar information to access including Contract Handler, Contract Mark/Principle, Contract Timeline, Contract Limitations, Contract Value/Payrate, Open Form Data, and Current Acceptance/Threat Count. The split information is different for the two hosts, but an interesting quirk is that they link at a certain level, and the value of the contract adjusts with the rating of the protection detail and the client can see how many contractors have accepted the job. A little balance to the scales.

- Neutral, can I get access to just the marks and the values for a little wagering site? We can connect and share

profits. Don't even need names, just codenames. We can make them clues to the identities to make the betting more interesting.

- /dev/grrl

- It really is an addiction for you.
- Slamm-0!

Both hosts are broken down a little further by the profile of the contract in order to avoid rookies getting themselves killed while trying to make a name for themselves. We also don't want them messing it up for the true professionals. The Hidden Blades host doesn't have limits on who can accept contracts unless requested by the contract's provider. As the two hosts have a link between the number of hitters on the contract and the threat, there is a minor effect, but since the HB host limits who has access, the ratings do not vary to the point where I feel I need to worry about it. The Unwavering Shield has a rating system called the Shield Rating for the contractors and teams based on their previous successful jobs from the host, as well as a Street Rep score determined by vetted individuals. The Shield Rating filters the jobs available to all individuals, so they cannot accept missions requiring ratings above their level. If several runners choose to work together and link their log ons, they get a new, combined Shield Rating to help them extend their reach a little. The system has a smart algorithm that remembers when runners link up and whether they succeed or fail together, and it adjusts Shield Ratings accordingly. Frankly, it's a delicious system.

THE HIDDEN BLADES

HIGH PROFILE

Contract Handler: AdSec33, St. Louis, CAS
Contract Mark: Johnny Spinrad
Contract Timeline: Ends 31/10/2078
Contract Limitations: Minimal collateral personnel damage; no explosives; positive ID required
Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Head of Spinrad Incorporated; travels frequently; affiliations with several other corporate executives; employs contract security through Minuteman Security; security director is codenamed Paratis
Current Acceptance Count: 2
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: Thank you for taking this contract. While the difficulty is high, the offer is lucrative in terms of nuyen, respect, and the connections the successful party will gain when the operation is complete. Please be advised that we have little information to provide about the target's specific location, as he travels frequently. His security is top notch in every location, and he travels with his own personal team of protection specialists from Minuteman Security who answer to a private contractor who goes by the name of Paratis. Paratis is a shadowrunner of some repute with a long history in protection. Spinrad is extensively cybered and has systems that could make him potentially lethal should the need arise. He is not considered an active combatant and usually prefers to escape under protective cover rather than engage in a drawn-out firefight.

As the owner of a AA-rated megacorporation, Spinrad has ample funds to offer in trade for his life and the charisma to convince anyone they will live to spend it. They will not. Be wary of this tactic and confirm all members of your team are informed of it as well.

This operation needs to be completed by the deadline provided, preferably sooner, in order for other operations to have time to take advantage of the situation. Potential bonus may be given if the operation is completed early.

- This is definitely tied to the possible moves going on between Spinrad and Villiers to manipulate St. Louis into becoming a free city and the next home of NeoNET. Could be locals looking to stop it or Villiers looking to clear out a powerful rival after he's gotten what he needs.
- Mr. Bonds

- Spinrad has made plenty of enemies. Lofwyr is certainly not fond of the man. This could be about his dealings in Europe or Africa, and St. Louis just provides a nice local cover. It may not be free, but it is a booming border city.
- Red Anya

- As if Lofwyr would hire a job like this out.
- Sticks

Contract Handler: Maester444, DeeCee, UCAS
Contract Mark: Samantha Payne
Contract Timeline: Ends 31/12/2078
Contract Limitations: Visual confirmation required; tissue sample required
Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Former UCAS House Majority Leader and Representative from South Dakota; currently resides in Mound City, SD, UCAS; maintains affiliations with several current and former UCAS, CAS, and NAN politicians; benefits from a two-person Secret Service detail along with a personal bodyguard, Aaron Grey
Current Acceptance Count: 4
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: This contract is not a simple political assassination. Samantha Payne is a known member of the infamous Black Lodge who, though no longer a member of the UCAS Congress, is working political and personal connections across North America to unknown ends. She is a lynchpin for current Lodge activities.

She is still allotted a small security detail from the UCAS Secret Service and maintains a personal body-

guard, Aaron Grey, who is also a suspected member of the Black Lodge. She is Awakened and a high enough grade initiate to hide her nature from government probes. Expect additional arcane resources to be active in her defense.

Her home is in South Dakota, outside Mound City. The grounds are patrolled day and night by both spirits and paracritters, and the home is warded. The insurance reports for the home list Knight Errant as "on-call" security along with an active PanicButton account as well as DocWagon Platinum contracts for both Payne and Grey.

End date on the contract is the yearly expiration for the current rate and parameters. New terms have been updated annually. Miss Payne has now been in the crosshairs for over three full years. Take that into consideration when deciding if you are right for this contract.

- Payne was a member of the Lodge of the All-Seeing Eye in DeeCee but got demoted. She dropped out of politics and didn't go up for re-election back in '74, claiming personal issues, but she hasn't had any health troubles since. All part of the process of getting demoted in the Lodge. She's now part of the Lodge of the Broken Plains. They pull strings all over central North America, even between the various nations.
- Arete

UPPER ECHELON

Contract Handler: TsimSon, Spokane, Salish-Shidhe Council

Contract Mark: Atian Parker

Contract Timeline: 14/04/2075 Open

Contract Limitations: Visual confirmation required; post-mortem immolation required

Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Member of the Tsimshian Council; resides in Kitimat, Tsimshian Protectorate, SSC; affiliated with Tsimshian Council, member of the New Progressive Party, Tlingit tribe; personal security provided by Eagle Security

Current Acceptance Count: 3

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: Target is a known head case, infected with the CFD virus during treatments for cancer caused by MCT pollution. Due to this condition, expectation is termination with visual verification and then destruction of the body to avoid spread. Payment will be made in two parts. The first payment will be transferred upon receipt of visual confirmation, the second payment will come one month later after secondary confirmations have been made. Contract provision is due to previous failures that underestimated the resiliency of the "head case" intelligence within Parker.

Target primarily resides in his three-story home near the outskirts of Kitimat. The log cabin possesses top-of-the-line security features and is linked directly to Eagle Security. Standard onsite security is provided by a pair of augmented Rottweilers. Augmented Rottweilers may carry the CFD virus; immolation upon neutralization is recommended.

Parker is known to associate with other individuals infected with the CFD virus. Confirmation of "head case" activity could create an opportunity for additional compensation.

- Parker is only one of a whole list of targets from the Tsimshian Council. Some of them were not re-elected in the 2075 election cycle but are still on the target list thanks to the new Monad issue. The contracts are likely being put out by other members of the TP government who don't want their secrets joining the cause.
- Mika

Contract Handler: GoldenSun6, Seattle Metroplex, UCAS
Contract Mark: Darius Grant
Contract Timeline: 12/07/2076 Open
Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; minimal collateral damage; zero damage to Manadyne property
Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Son of missing Manadyne CEO Malcolm Grant, resides in Staten Island, NY, UCAS; personal security provided by Manadyne
Current Acceptance Count: 8
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: As the son of Malcolm Grant, former CEO and major shareholder in Manadyne, Darius now possesses substantial power within the megacorporation—power that does not belong in the hands of a nineteen-year-old pampered corporate brat.

His primary residence is a penthouse condominium in the Wolfe Pond Complex in Staten Island. The building is wholly owned by Manadyne and onsite security, provided by Knight Errant, has full extraterritorial privileges. The physical security in the building is a mix of plainclothes and uniforms with reinforcements on call from the local KE precinct. Matrix and astral security for the building are also provided by Knight Errant, but astral security is augmented by Manadyne personnel who can ward their own domiciles and summon additional spirits as support and backup.

Darius frequents many clubs within nearby Manhattan as well as the cities he visits for business. His security detail for these excursions varies but has been increased of late due to failed attempts on his life. Security is often provided by discreet "contract" security for a single night out.

Darius is not Awakened, a fact that has many thinking he does not belong in any position of power within Manadyne. He has a solid understanding of magical theory and uses manatech devices frequently and creatively.

- They're serious about no Manadyne property, and that includes employees. Minimal non-lethal force only. Even an accidental kill will get your contract revoked. Obviously the Handler is with Manadyne and doesn't want to hurt the bottom line while trying to remove a potential problem.
- Thorn

- Sounds like an exploitable weakness for anyone running security. Best to surround him with a few Manadyne sycophants to slide the odds in your favor.
- Sticks

Contract Handler: Connection116, Public Grid
Contract Mark: Valaria Gutribrach
Contract Timeline: 01/01/2077 Open
Contract Limitations: Positive ID required, meaning close visual confirmation or tissue sample
Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: CFO Maersk Logistics; residence in Stockholm, Scandinavian Union; inter/intra AA megacorporate affiliations; no specified personal security
Current Acceptance Count: 4
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: Thank you for accepting this contract. The target, Valaria Gutribach, is currently suspected of conspiring to undermine the stability of the Scandinavian Union. Her efforts are of equal interest to the contracting party, and additional compensation could be earned through useful surveillance data (associates, interactions, abnormal expenditures, etc.).

Gutribach's lack of personal security may make this contract appear easy, but her daily routine never takes her far from Maersk onsite security personnel. When it does, she travels via armored limousine with a Personal Security Specialist from Maersk as the driver, whose training focuses on evasion over engagement.

Her home is within a Maersk-owned complex near the docks in Stockholm. Facility security is maintained by Maersk, and she spends ninety percent of her time within the complex. Time outside the complex is spent at meetings with other corporate officers, both within Maersk divisions and from outside the megacorporation.

This contract has no use of force limitations. Collateral personnel and property damage will not decrease the value of the contract, though excessive use of force or a terror act level of violence could bring unwanted attention. As with all contracts taken through this host, connections will be denied.

- Definitely snag any connections this one makes. If anyone on JP gets some recon info, hit me with a PM. I may outbid the contractor.
- Icarus

- Building your files on the Syndexioi, Icarus. That's what you might be stepping into. It has little to do with the Scand U, and everything to do with destabilizing the CC. Pay seems light, but that's all part of the front that you're dealing with a Maersk exec fooling around with some second-rate Euronation.
- Fianchetto

Contract Handler: Daley; O'Hare Subsprawl, Chicago, IL, UCAS

Contract Mark: Governor Anthony Presbitero

Contract Timeline: 01/01/2076; Open

Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; collateral damage acceptable; public action preferred

Contract Value: ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Governor of Illinois; offices in Springfield, IL, UCAS, and Southside Subsprawl, Chicago, IL, UCAS; residences in Southside Subsprawl, Chicago, IL, UCAS and New Orleans, LA, CAS; frequent use of Hilton Hotel facilities in Chicago, IL, UCAS, Springfield, IL, UCAS, St. Louis, CAS, and DeeCee, UCAS; known to affiliate with shadowrunners through various Mr. Johnsons; has close ties to Chicago based Osiris, Howling Wind, and Crone; contract security provided by Lone Star Security Services at locations, personal security handled by SecureTech, Inc.

Current Acceptance Count: 6

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: Public information on the target is abundant. Target is highly active in a wide variety of political and corporate engagements requiring frequent travel and allowing for minimal time at his registered address in the Southside subsprawl of Chicago. His election on the platform of "Rebuilding Chicago for Chicagoans" has been his primary focus, but he's been down in St. Louis and New Orleans talking to a lot of corporate and CAS government officials over the past year.

Target's home is a converted warehouse and former chemical facility, located at the corner of 129th and Pulaski. Presbitero had the entire site cleaned and converted as a green cleanup project for a previous campaign. The site has excellent security and is located directly across the street from the SecureTech, Inc. training facility, a security firm for which Presbitero holds a significant quantity of stock and a seat on their Board of Directors. Presbitero's home is a sprawling complex with additional wings and facilities set up to host visiting VIPs. The location is often in use even when the governor is not present.

Completion of the contract that is public and brutal will be considered for a bonus based on the media coverage of the investigation.

- Way to CYA! Pay them extra to lay out a nice breadcrumb trail for the media. This Daley guy's a thinker. And brutal! He wants this hit done in the true Chicago way. Wonder what Presbitero did to piss him off? No matter. Just wanted to mention SecureTech and their employees and owners. Every one of them is a former (or current) runner. Their board meetings are a Johnson's wet dream. It's like Assets Inc., only Chicago natives. Maxwell Casilov, once known as Stubby on the street, was a bodyguard in the '50s, who had a ten-year shadow career that he poured into a solid SIN and SecureTech. Gabriel Charm was a snake shaman physad known as Talus Nex in the '50s as well. He ran the same course as Casilov, but when the comet came by he SURGEd and slipped back into the shadows for a few more years. He recruited a lot of the security talent the company uses for contracts now. Scott Wolf is either an exceptionally powerful shaman or a free spirit. Street legend has him as the former turned into the latter, but true or not he's as serious a force in the boardroom as he was on the streets. The other four members of the board are just as dangerous. Governor Pres is well-covered.
- Bull

MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

Contract Handler: StarKiller911, AzGrid

Contract Mark: Aufheben

Contract Timeline: Ends 01/01/2078

Contract Limitations: Visual confirmation required; biometric ID required

Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Current leader of Bright Star; resides near Bogotá; Bright Star affiliations; no private security contracts

Current Acceptance Count: 3

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: The target is currently acting as the head of Bright Star, a terrorist organization seeking to undermine the efforts at stabilization within Bogota. As a well-known shadowrunner and veteran of the Az-Am war the target has extensive connections around the world as well as in and around Bogotá. Target has no standard contract security but is often in the company of other terrorists with a wide variety of skill sets.

Target is highly mobile and takes up residence with fellow members or sympathizers of Bright Star. This

means that collateral damage to these facilities or persons is of no concern to the contractor. Confirmation on multiple open and accepted contracts will be paid in full.

- Nice to see one of our own make this list.
- Slamm-0!

- Nice to know I'm wanted. If someone isn't gunning for me, then I haven't done enough agitating. I know they've got 75K for my head down here. I wonder if "¥ ¥ ¥" is more than that. This is interesting to see that someone has gone so far as to open the job up to pros, but this is not the kind of place for assassins. Merc groups or runner teams have a better chance. Too many things down here will kill you if you don't have someone to watch your six.
- Aufheben

- I've figured out the ¥ ratings. Each icon is an additional zero beyond the 100s place. ¥ = thousands, ¥ ¥ = tens of thousands, ¥ ¥ ¥ = hundreds of thousands, etc. Not a perfect science, but it gives a range. The payoff for you is at least 100K, but could be 999K. I may be new, but I've heard you'll make people earn their money.
- Balladeer

- Smart defensive or even intel operations can use this site's Acceptance Count as a way to tell when a meeting at a site has been compromised. If the numbers tick up on several targets all currently meeting at the same spot, your blown and someone has your number.
- Stone

Contract Handler: SolSearcher777, New Orleans, LA, CAS

Contract Mark: Jorge Cordejeña, La Productor, Luz Veras

Contract Timeline: 15/04/2076 Open

Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; visual confirmation required; tissue sample required; public discovery required

Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Confirmed terrorist; rumored residence in Zona Sur, Bogotá; known affiliate of Bright Star and The Light of Truth Matrix broadcast; personal bodyguard referred to as Escuda de las Creencia

Current Acceptance Count: 2

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: Cordejeña is the leader and organizer of a guerrilla Matrix broadcast known as the Light of Truth. The broadcast and those behind it seek to undermine the efforts Aztechnology has put into the infrastructure and rebuilding of Bogotá after the recent conflicts. The exact location of his residence in Bogotá is unknown, but local intelligence assets can be arranged with contract acceptance and verification of identification.

The target is a skilled rigger. He is rarely without extensive drone surveillance of his immediate vicinity, and he performs advanced reconnaissance for locations he plans to visit. This is often the best way to identify where he will be, as he does not have any kind of formal schedule and moves the broadcast location for the Light of Truth frequently.

Target security will not be provided by a contract or corporate security provider in the region. Local terrorist forces are known to provide security for meetings and transportation of the target. His personal security is provided by his bodyguard, known on the streets as Escuda de las Creencia, or Escuda for short. He is an experienced combatant, having seen action in the recent conflict as well as being a renowned pit fighter. Based on his level of skill but lack of financial support, it is suspected that Escuda is an adept. Additional close security will likely include a team of security operatives covering all three primary aspects of security—Physical, Astral, and Matrix—especially while broadcasting.

The Light of Truth is also supported by the local Catholic Church and may be using former church holdings as operating bases, especially those that are in poorer neighborhoods or in dilapidated condition after being cleared of insurgent elements.

- Escuda is a member of the Vigilant Iron Schooling House, so he's totally an adept. He set up a few schools (they call them arenas) around Bogotá, taking in street kids whether they got Talent or not. The arenas train them all, and Escuda takes the ones with the Talent for extra work. With Escuda on board, the Light of Truth has plenty of adept muscle to rain down on foes when they're in trouble.
- Matt Wrath

- With what the Azzies did to the church's assets, I'm not surprised they're helping the LoT. There are a lot of places to hide work from all over Bogotá that the Catholics can help with. They're also pretty handy for getting people and items in and out of town.
- Traveler Jones

- Even if they take down La Productor, a new one will take his place. It's a lot of money for one man.
- Aufheben

- It's going to be about the message. They want the body left in public or the job done there. They want people to know what happens to those who go against the will of Aztechnology/Aztlan.
- Balladeer

Contract Handler: MaxPrime9, AlohaNet (Hawai'i grid)

Contract Mark: Hans Brackhaus, Gerhard von Strecht, Kenneth Kascien

Contract Timeline: 07/07/2076 Open

Contract Limitations: Visual confirmation required; positive ID required; incendiary/explosive methods preferred; target destruction required

Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Known Saeder-Krupp affiliations; residing in Hawai'i; abundant underworld affiliations; personal security varies

Current Acceptance Count: 12

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: Welcome to what will be a very lucrative contract. The target(s) for this contract are corporate citizens of Saeder-Krupp who have become non-viable assets for the company in the nation of Hawai'i due to CFD infection. This is a purge operation with multiple available targets and a wide variety of potential obstructions.

The name Hans Brackhaus is a common replacement for Mr. Johnson in the shadows, and while Saeder-Krupp values the services provided by those who utilize that moniker, the situation in Hawai'i is highly volatile and risks the reputation of the megacorporation in the Hawai'ian shadows and within the nation itself.

Each individual is required to be positively identified and cross-referenced with the local contact prior to the execution of any plan for termination. Terminations will require visual confirmation followed by immediate destruction of the target body to prevent further spread of the CFD virus. With the recent events concerning the so-called "Monads," those infected with CFD may have additional resources or aid at their disposal.

- A chummer was talking trash about S-K over a few drinks and mentioned some work in Hawai'i. He talked about the Johnson refusing several positive IDs and the massive loss of nuyen he and the team had to eat because of the wishy-washy Johnson. Maybe the same gig, maybe not, but it's a tip for running in Hawai'i either way.
- Bull

- In case you're young and clueless, this work screams SK Prime. Which again, if you are young and clueless, means you are only about two steps, if that, removed from working for a dragon. Beware.
- Thorn

Contract Handler: Ender4, Emerald City (Seattle grid)

Contract Mark: Butch

Contract Timeline: 01/05/2076 Open

Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; special circumstances; Certified Contract (acceptance limit, time limit)

Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Known shadowrunner and street doc; primary residence Seattle, UCAS; verified sightings: Boston, UCAS, Atlanta, CAS, London, UK, Free City of Lagos, Chicago, UCAS, Detroit, UCAS, St. Louis, CAS; associated with JackPoint VPN, Monad movement; no confirmed contract security

Current Acceptance Count: 1 (Locked)

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: Thank you for accepting this Certified Contract. The contract will remain locked from other users until you have completed your accepted assignment, are rendered incapable of completing your assignment, or fail to complete the assignment within the requested window of time, at which point a subcontract will be set out for you. Additional contract stipulations include a bonus for any and/or all data located on the person, in the commlink/dataterm, or in a verified storage node of the target and a zero-witness policy. This bonus will be based on the quality and quantity of the data upon delivery. The zero-witness policy requires there be no witnesses to the death event or the deceased post termination. It is the responsibility of the contractor to fulfill this portion of the contract and neutralize any witnesses, be they living or electronic.

The target is an experienced street operative with extensive connections among the members of the well-respected JackPoint VPN. She has been consistently on the move for several years, rarely staying in any single location for more than a few days. Her connections have provided a vast variety of living arrangements from fake SINs for hotel/motel rental to hacking corporate residences while executives are out of town. Security, when needed, is provided by shadowrunners, vetted through her extensive contacts. While these individuals may be trusted not to sell her location to corporate information brokers, they are rarely capable of withstanding extensive questioning and can be used as a source of information for her next move.

Update: With the recent events involving the Monads, Butch has made contact and gained another avenue of assistance. Analysis of interactions shows an increase in her level of acceptable risk when dealing with the Monads she has had contact with.

- Another of ours, though this is not surprising at all. Butch has been on the megacorporate drek list since she first starting digging into CFD. The paydata bonus is a nice touch and not at all surprising, but what's up with the no witnesses? That's a little dark.
- Netcat

- Common corporate tactic. That way whether she's dead or disappeared, no one knows.
- Thorn

- I discovered the name of the one contractor. PM me if you are interested in helping drop that Acceptance Count.
- Slamm-0!

- Nice to see I'm a valuable target. Thanks for watching out for me everyone. Back to the highly mobile life.
- Butch

Contract Handler: PSmith222, Atlanta, GA, CAS
Contract Mark: Ingrid Belltinarius
Contract Timeline: 13-12-2074 Open
Contract Limitations: Tissue sample required; minimal collateral damage; minimal public exposure
Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Advanced Hermetics Instructor at Texas A&M; residence in Burton, TX, CAS; membership in Ordo Maximus; Lone Star Private security contract
Current Acceptance Count: 27
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: Target is a skilled hermetic magician with advanced degrees across the fields of thaumaturgy. Her course listings include no undergraduate courses, and she is the doctoral advisor for twenty-four research projects at Texas A&M, most focusing on the integration of the arcane and the electronic. Unlike many of her colleagues, Belltinarius is actively involved in the lab work of her students. She is a confirmed member of the Ordo Maximus arcane society with a solid reputation within the organization leading to extensive connections in a number of other fields and areas as well as several influential friends and acquaintances.

Security at the school is provided by a private contract with Lone Star. The private police company often recruits from the school and thus considers security, and their image here, a high priority. Belltinarius has a personal protection contract with Lone Star as well that provides her with round-the-clock monitoring, threat investigation services, and personal security during public events, the first two weeks of each semester, exam week, spring and winter breaks, and Wiccan holidays. She may also receive additional security through the contract at a discounted rate.

Her home in Burton is located on a peninsula along the southern shore of Somerville Lake and is also under a private contract with Lone Star. The home is vast and contains several unique features. It has three floors totaling over 3,000 square meters of floor space not counting the rooftop deck or the private cave, and it sits on half a square kilometer of land. Each floor of the home has a deck facing the water and a wraparound porch. Stairs connect all of the decks and the lowest deck to a walkway down to the two private docks and three boathouses. The private cave is accessed from inside the home via a spiral stairwell, and externally via a small snaking waterway. The main cavern is about 200 square meters, half water, and supposedly leads to several other underground rooms.

She usually travels via personal helicopter to and from the school, though she also owns several ground and water craft. Her private helicopter is a decommissioned Lone Star Wasp that she flies personally. While she may not have personal security around at all times, she is a hermetic mage and rarely is without the services of several spirits.

- Acceptance count of 27. She's got a lot of crosshairs on her back. What gives?
- Slamm-0!

- I asked nicely, and Neutral said the count only goes down if the contractor actively ends the contract. This contract has had a lot of contractors never check back in, so the count stays high. He leaves it there as a warning, but people keep going for it.
- Glitch

- Is she a vampire?
- Hard Exit

- All signs point to no. But she is connected to the Ordo and studies magic and tech, so she probably has something to do with their cybermantic endeavors.
- Hannibelle

Contract Handler: Ramses404, Miami, Carib League
Contract Mark: Daryl Gates, a.k.a. Hal Neinkay, Jonathon St. Cinq, Adam Friday, Anthony Jarvis
Contract Timeline: 03/02/2077 Open
Contract Limitations: Biometric ID required; visual confirmation required; medical death confirmation required
Contract Value: ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Confirmed Monad; operates across North America; affiliations within Project Exodus, Society of the Phoenix Arisen, and Forgotten Youth; no contract security, personal security varies
Current Acceptance Count: 6
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: Target is a known Monad working to eliminate obstacles to Project Exodus within corporate and national hierarchies. Target may be more than one individual utilizing similar identities or proxies to perform mundane meetings or tasks. Full biometric scans are provided for the target that include all standard biometric data plus physical measures such as stride length, gait angle, forearm length, and digit angles. This data will confirm only for the actual target. Unconfirmed targets should not be terminated but can be scanned, and their data will earn a two percent bonus for each scanned target, up to ten percent.

The target moves around the continent frequently and travels with a stable security detail composed of six former Evo Marines. These individuals are also Monads. Land transport appears most common, though flights have been used when time is short. During flights the target usually has two of his security detail while the remaining four follow with the ground transport. The target stays in quality hotels with solid security whenever possible. When such venues are not an option, the target allows his security team to select their accommodations. The target has some form of extended-living situation in

central North America. The specific location is unknown, but its most likely location is somewhere southeast of the Front Range Free Zone where the UCAS, CAS, Sioux Nation, and PCC all share borders, though which nation holds it is unknown.

Land transport consists of a trio of Rover Model 2072 vans and a Ford-Canada Buffalo RV. The RV rarely enters into most major metroplexes and is often left behind by the team when they enter dense urban areas. This could very well be the extended living situation, but that would raise the question of why they return to the same region between meetings. The three Rovers are each identical from the outside, but internally two have been heavily modified. The standard Rover is their transport vehicle with all the standard high-end amenities and probably a few additional security features. The two modified vans are a command and communications vehicle, and their mobile armory and drone-deployment vehicle.

- Nice toys! I wonder who's funding these guys? Are those Evo Marines really former Marines, or are they just on loan?
- Slamm-0!

- This guy is probably one of many with a price on their head for trying to help the head cases. Though based on the price tag on this guy, he's probably up near the top of the organized effort.
- Clockwork

- Speaking of Monads and head cases and CFD sufferers, what's the difference? Monads are the ones from Gagarin first and foremost, but are all the head cases now Monads? What about the really crazy ones? Do they get to be Monads or will they be the head cases now? And do the Monads include the talking dogs and the other animal head cases, or just the metahumans. This would all be so much easier if the world would just stop being such corporate slaves and open their eyes instead of their mouths.
- Chainmaker

- Any being that has been influenced or modified, or both, by an AI via the CFD virus can be considered a Monad (except the Boston nutcases). All of the other names, labels, nicknames, and insults that have been placed on them should be replaced with the racial term Monad. This is what they would like, and it's the legacy they want left behind so that those who choose to stay have an identity, not an insulting nickname.
- Plan 9

- They are thieves who stole bodies and lives. I don't care much about looking out for their feelings.
- Haze

AVERAGE MARKS

Contract Handler: Alistare07, Cheyenne, Sioux Nation
Contract Mark: Moyhan Dance-with-Elk
Contract Timeline: 24/10/2077 Open
Contract Limitations: Visual confirmation required; maximum public exposure; suspicion deferral required
Contract Value: ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Director of Land Management and Property Development, Small Business Administration (PCC); resides in Santa Fe, PCC; affiliated with PCC government in Santa Fe; Security contract provided by Santa Fe's City Police Force
Current Acceptance Count: 8
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: Dance-with-Elk is a mid-level executive for the PCC Small Business Administration in Santa Fe. He lives in a small government-owned complex on the forested slopes of the Sangre de Christo mountains east of downtown Santa Fe. He and several other government employees travel into the city together via an armored transport bus when they work from their offices. Most of the time he works from home, accessing the government host via the city's grid. The government living complex consists of eighteen homes arranged on four parallel switchback streets, with each home partially built into the mountainside. The streets have a decreasing number of houses the higher up the mountainside you drive. There are eight homes on lowest lane, five homes on the second lane, three on the third, and only two on the top road. Moyhan lives on the third lane.

Security at the complex is provided by a private substation of the Sante Fe Metro police force. They man a guardhouse at the base of the road, occasionally patrol the road, and are responsible for responding to resident calls. The substation response time is under two minutes, but the backup response times are significantly longer due to the remote nature of the facility.

- Dance-with-Elk is a straight shooter. He's probably in the sights of a local corp or organization that wasn't able to buy him. He's also probably completely oblivious to this fact, as he's one of the millions who think they live in some perfect corporate state.
- Mika

- He may be ignorant of the threat, but he's not exactly an easy target. The Matrix security around him when he hops over to work is tight and the security on the run between the complex and the city offices is solid. The housing complex may seem easy with slow response times, but the on-site guards are top-tier and trained to take advantage of the terrain and the fleet of drones they have in the storage garages they have stationed along the edge of the roadway. This place was originally made for more than government pencil pushers, I'm sure of it.
- Stone

Contract Handler: NETStar1, St. Louis, CAS or NeoNETwork
Contract Mark: Tirenial Latherenailen, a.k.a. Archon or Arc
Contract Timeline: 14/06/2077 Open
Contract Limitations: Minimal collateral damage; visual confirmation required
Contract Value: ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: CAS citizen; resides in St. Louis, CAS; affiliations with Ancients criminal organization; contract security provided by Minuteman Security
Current Acceptance Count: 5
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: The target is a NeoNET citizen who has separated himself from the standard corporate lifestyle. He engages in illegal activities and ... oh, frag this. Sorry Mr. Neutral, I'm telling it like it is. If the contractors figure out who I am, oh well. This punk is a ganger in the Ancients who took advantage of my daughter. He used that bulldrek elven charm and bad boy ganger image to lure her away from the safety of the corporate life.

His residence of record is the Cass Avenue apartment complex, a NeoNET corporate housing facility, but he never stays there. That's why I listed Minuteman as the security. His security is going to be a bunch of other wannabe bad boy dandy-eaters looking for more little corporate girls to prey on. The Ancients around here are a bunch of little upstart corp kids who somehow keep from getting their hoops kicked by the real gang, but they manage to play off their seriously dangerous reputation.

I'll add in a little extra if you bring me his ears and nuts so I can make a nice necklace out of them!

- This guy is crazy! And he doesn't know squat about the streets of St. Louis. The Ancients in the area are serious news, not a bunch of corp kids. They expanded out here after a cross-country run forced them to use the St. Louis border crossing and they saw the potential. Archon is also not some street thug. He's a lieutenant and a serious spellcaster. The streets have him formally trained at MIT&T before getting on the wrong side of the Bane-Sidhe.
- Bull

- This guy's daughter is also still with Arc. He's been seeing the same girl for almost a year and catching drek for it the entire time because she's human.
- Balladeer

- Strange. The girl in question is Cami Arress. She's former NeoNET, but according to the local screamsheets her father died in a security breach at the beginning of June. She got a choice to sign a contract as a wagemage or find employment elsewhere. Guess we know which way she went.
- /dev/grrl

Contract Handler: Johnson187, Sacramento, CFS
Contract Mark: Tenahsia Coovair, a.k.a. TeeCoo
Contract Timeline: Ends 01/01/2078
Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; visual confirmation required; specialized payment stipulations
Contract Value: ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Sim actress; resides in Sacramento, CFS; no criminal affiliations; no contract security
Current Acceptance Count: 17
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: Target is well-known simstarlet Tenahsia Coovair. Last seen exiting her residence at 707 3rd Street in Sacramento, California Free State, on July 5th, in the company of a well-dressed male ork, who witnesses heard her refer to as Truck. She is believed to be in the Sacramento region but may have gone east or south toward the Pueblo Corporate Council border near Los Angeles or Reno.

The target is likely in the presence of "shadowrunners" and maintaining a low profile. While positive ID and a visual confirmation are required, an unaltered video feed of a bullet passing through her head would suffice over a closer inspection if this is not possible due to security concerns. Coovair is the only paid target. Additional killing, while acceptable, will not earn additional payment. Apprehension or collection of bounties on wanted targets is acceptable as long as the primary task is completed.

Upon completion, payment will be made in person with transfer of confirmation due at time of payment.

- "Shadowrunners"—I love being referred to in quotes. Not that I actually have TeeCoo with me, but I do consider myself part of the (apparently unfamiliar) profession. I think I'll put it in quotes from now on. Just goes to show that, whoever "Johnson187" is, he's not a real Mr. Johnson, or he wouldn't have referred to us like that. This means you'll be working for a corp geek with no real street experience. Have fun with this contract. Watch out for cops at the payoff.
- Stone

LOW PROFILE

Contract Handler: MountainDagger; Denver, Front Range Free Zone; Sky City grid
Contract Mark: David Nelson
Contract Timeline: 03/02/2077 Open
Contract Limitations: None
Contract Value: ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: CAS citizen; resides in Denver, FRFZ; no known affiliations; no contract/private security
Current Acceptance Count: 2
Accept Contract: Y/N
Information: The target is a former Catholic priest currently living on the streets as a vagrant and violent public nuisance. His actions grow more and more violent

by the day, while local police turn a blind eye due to his former profession. The target has assaulted local prostitutes and legal substance vendors in an attempt to "purify" the community where he once gave his sermons.

The target will have no security and can be found stumbling along Logan Street searching for his next victim. While no limitations are being placed on this contract, a bonus is offered should the target be terminated and left crucified for all to see so they may rejoice in his well-deserved punishment.

- Father David Nelson is a Catholic priest in a part of town not friendly to Catholic priests. He operated from what was left of Mother of God on Logan, an Azzie neighborhood after the split. He's now a street preacher, at best, and a muttering, apocalypse-spewing drunk most of the time. I'm not exactly sure why someone would want to use him for such a gruesome statement. Sounds a lot more personal than the info above lets on.
- Pistons
- MountainDagger is the Matrix handle for a member of Los Pumas de la Montaña Sombra, an Aztlaner gang that is growing in the neighborhood. He could be their message to the locals or even to the ZDF that this is their turf.
- Netcat
- Let's hope it's a message to the ZDF, and they eventually feed these sadists to Ghostwalker.
- Aufheben

Contract Handler: Capo014, Atlanta, GA, CAS
Contract Mark: Benjamin Ventrigulia
Contract Timeline: 18/07/2077 Open
Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; visual confirmation required
Contract Value: ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Branch Manager, Atlanta International Bank; resides in AIB Tower, Downtown Atlanta, GA, CAS; Ares corporate affiliations; contract security provided by Knight Errant
Current Acceptance Count: 2

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: Target is a CAS citizen working for Atlanta International Bank as the manager of their primary branch, located in their HQ building in downtown Atlanta. His home is located inside the same building as his bank branch, the AIB Tower. The Tower uses Knight Errant as their private security force, and it contains offices, residences, and attractions to keep its inhabitants inside. It isn't an arcology, so it's not completely self-sufficient, but it's close.

The target has a family. While they are not targets, they can be used as leverage to draw the target to a better location. The wife leaves the building at least once a week to meet friends, once a month to see her stylist, and sporadically to shop in some of the high-end downtown stores where it's just as important to be seen shopping there as it is to actually shop there. His son plays a variety of sports that get him out of the Tower at least twice a week. His daughter spends the most time outside of the Tower, as she's a rigger for Lone Star's prison division as a transport driver. Six of the seven days a week she leaves in her unmarked Patrol-1 to report to the local facilities.

- AIB is a subsidiary of Ares Macrotechnology. They're far enough removed that they use the extraterritorial standing of KE as their security instead of from Ares. Same result, different master. That might change if Ares gets a little friendlier in the Confederacy.
- Sticks

STREET JOBS

Contract Handler: BlackWidow10, Seattle, UCAS; Emerald City

Contract Mark: William Breech, a.k.a. Billy B.

Contract Timeline: 15/08/2077 Open

Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; special requirements

Contract Value: ¥

Open Form Data: UCAS citizen, works for Club Penumbra; resides in Redmond; contact with criminal element at work; no private contract security

Current Acceptance Count: 4

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: He's a dirtbag who works as a bouncer at Club Penumbra. He runs into a lot of seedy characters there and has a lot of shady side deals and side work going on. He lives in the Touristville area of Redmond in a rundown but really big house. He may have been just squatting there and might have moved. He owns a few guns and has a thing for pretty young elf girls with no brains.

The special requirements for this contract are pretty simple. The death can't injure his kids, and it has to look like an accident. Target has a Basic DocWagon contract through the end of the year.

His latest squeeze is a seventeen-year-old elven corp slitch brat who thinks slumming with the human bouncer is cool. She lives in a NeoNET facility when she's not shacked up in his place. The big house he lives in has a lot of parties because it's such a large space. There's a pool in the back and a little pool shack. The place has three floors plus a basement and looks like a castle, kind of. He's probably stealing power from the city.

He gets quite a few gangers hanging out at his place, and they call it a neutral spot, but fights are pretty common. The back yard is big, too, and it has a big ring where he runs fights sometimes. The gangers settle scores there.

- Neutral obviously lets the contractors write their own info sections. This one sounds close, young, and bitter. Maybe an ex. Breech isn't a big name in Redmond and someone else will fill his niche quick, but for now he's operating as a shadow recruiter for Urubia. I don't think the dragon will miss him, but it's a good point to know if you go after Billy B, and she happens to be end up caring.
- Sounder

- Urubia has a lot of guys like this all over Redmond. Funny to have one being targeted on here by someone who isn't Urubia. She cleans them out frequently so that they don't get too comfortable.
- 2XL

- Who's to say that the contractor isn't Urubia? Sounds like an angry woman. I think Urubia could play that part if she needed to, especially in writing.
- Frosty

- I think she'd pay more. Or just take care of business herself.
- Balladeer

- The rich stay rich by not giving the money away. She'll pay what the job deserves. This is the kind of job a street thug on novacoke could pull off.
- Mr. Bonds

Contract Handler: Nikita86, Los Angeles, PCC

Contract Mark: Toña Chavez, aka Ñaña, Madre T, Lady Noche

Contract Timeline: 01/07/2077 Open

Contract Limitations: Positive ID required; visual confirmation required; no collateral damage

Contract Value: ¥

Open Form Data: Criminal SIN on record for prostitution; operates around LA; affiliated with corporate and government employees, PCC citizens, criminal elements; "contract" security provided by Grim's Reapers

Current Acceptance Count: 7

Accept Contract: Y/N

Information: The target is a madam who operates several stables around Los Angeles. The location of her

residence is unknown, but her three stables live and operate near the El Infierno, Fun City, and Hollywood neighborhoods. They are far enough from the danger, wageslaves, and glitz to be safe, seem dangerous, and remain discreet for each location respectively. Clients of all walks of life can be found interacting with her boys, girls, and others.

Grim's Reapers, a mid-size gang that makes most of its money trafficking in metahumans and CalHots, also sidelines as the target's personal and property security. The gang has a mix of metatypes and operates as both a mobile go-gang and as a territorial gang in the target's main areas of operation. The gang has a larger-than-average number of Awakened and, according to their reputation, opposes just about everyone. Grim's Reapers have an issue with the Japanacorps for Saito, the Native Americans for the PCC taking over, the Azzies for being the Azzies, and most of the other corps for bailing on so many citizens during decades of tragedies. Grim is often a personal escort for Lady Noche.

The operation for Lady Noche is a mix of brothel services and street walkers that use designated alley spots, squats, and motels to do business depending on the needs and wants of the clients. She moves between the three places in a random pattern to keep her workers on their toes. Slacking when you're supposed to be working for her is punished harshly, and Grim's Reapers have no problem shipping off slightly damaged merchandise to less picky clients.

While Lady Noche is a grade-A slitch, her stable of girls and boys don't deserve to be hurt because of her. Members of Grim's Reapers know what they signed up for and can take it hard if they get between you and your target.

- Rumors have Grim and Lady Noche romantically—or whatever passes for romance—linked. He won't take a hit on her very well.
- Traveler Jones

- Smart spots to work from. El Infierno has dangerous and paranoid people around. Fun City has corporate security all over protecting their workforce. Hollywood has celebs with private security at every corner always on the lookout for trouble. She's getting security without paying for it.
- Stone
- Lady Noche hasn't been around for almost a decade without knowing how to do business the right way. She has ebbed and flowed with the times but always floats back to the top of her particular cesspool.
- 2XL

THE UNWAVERING SHIELD

HIGH PROFILE

Contract Handler: Mr. Johnson (Pathfinder Multimedia)
Contract Principle: Gordon Schumway; a.k.a. Bix Wreckage
Contact Timeline: Ends approximately 12/2077
Contract Payrate: ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Lead singer of Dark Tides; resides in Seattle, UCAS, currently touring North America; close protection detail
Threat Count: Unknown
Information: Bix is having trouble since he sent his wife divorce papers when he found out she is not really who she claimed. His wife, Ellen Schumway (nee Atherton), is really a criminal by the name of Til. She earned the name from the saying "unTIL death do us part." She's a black widow and is not used to her prey discovering that fact this early. She now wants Bix dead before the papers are finalized. Dark Tides can't afford the bad press, especially Bix, as he's on the edge of losing his place at the microphone to their new backup vocalist, Stürm Fröst.

The band will be traveling between several major North American cities for the final months of the year and will need the protection detail to be willing to travel in tour rigs.

- Til is more than an everyday black widow. She's an assassin gone the easy route. She has all the skills to play the game the hard way but she now uses a smile to kill her targets, and she gets the inheritance to boot. She might be desperate with this play. She's pushing the edge of the cute, new, young wife and may be looking for that last big score.
- Thorn

- Whoever gets this better watch out for collaboration. That new singer might be willing to lend a hand in the killing for his own ends. And that's if he's not already playing that role.
- Stone

Contract Handler: InterMEDIA Enterprises
Contract Principle: Tenahsia Coovair
Contact Timeline: Long term; until 02/01/2078
Contract Payrate: ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Simsense Star; Sacramento, California Free State; extended protection (limited region)
Threat Count: 17
Information: Miss Coovair has recently decided to void her contract with Pathfinder Multimedia. Negotiations with InterMEDIA Enterprises are underway but cannot be completed until her previous contract is terminated. Her previous employer is refusing to terminate the contract and has instead chosen to terminate Miss

Coovair. Extraction team is not a long-term protection team, and InterMEDIA Enterprises is looking for a deniable asset team for extended protection detail.

Client must stay within the borders of California Free State as a stipulation of her current contract. Border crossings risk a contract violation tat extends the contract by six months. Movement within the borders of the CFS is acceptable. Miss Coovair has two traveling companions who will also need to be protected in order to insure Miss Coovair's safety. Elise Grant is Miss Coovair's personal assistant and sister. Tina Grant is Miss Grant's daughter and Miss Coovair's niece.

Upon completion of the required time, the protection detail will be expected to deliver Miss Coovair and her companions to the offices of InterMEDIA Enterprises in Los Angeles, PCC.

- Niece my hoop! Coovair dropped off the sim-scene for almost a year back in '70, claiming she had to recenter herself and cope with her enhanced emotional state after the loss of her longtime boyfriend. She disappeared, and press docs all claimed she was off on an island somewhere in the South Pacific. April of '71 rolls around with a brand new film, *Island Escape,* and a personal assistant/sister in tow who happens to have a newborn.
- Sunshine

- The tight regional space may seem like a limitation but it really just means that a team could go completely off the grid in the mountains and then reappear when everything's clear. Critters and boredom are better than hot lead and excitement any day.
- Thorn

- Depends on the critters, and CalFree has their share of really unpleasant ones. Especially up in that region.
- Frosty

UPPER MANAGEMENT

Contract Handler: Paladyne00
Contract Principle: Steven Ames
Contact Timeline: Open-ended, minimum 1 month
Contract Payrate: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Single principle; resides in Cheyenne, Sioux Nation; personal security detail (full spectrum); possible contract expansion
Threat Count: Unknown
Information: Good day, potential protectors. My name is Steven Ames. I am the Regional CEO of Sales Management for Maersk in Cheyenne, and I require additional private security for an extended duration while I make arrangements to depart from Maersk for greener pastures. During this time I will be making contact with several individuals who are not affiliated with my corporation. These interactions may be positive, negative, or neutral, and the aftereffects of these meetings may follow the same patterns, even to the point of creating possible danger to my life. If this first section sounds interesting and within your skill set, read on. If it does not, please cancel the connection contract and move on to another client.

The next hurdle you must overcome is the breadth of services needed. When I selected full spectrum, I truly meant it. I don't want some "street razor" with a team consisting of his kid brother who dabbles in hacking and some local burned-out P.I. who has just enough mojo left in him to call himself a mage. I want a skilled mana expert, preferably an initiate, with skills in both the cast and summoning aspects. I want a street samurai with a real code of honor or a former mercenary who understands what my money is buying. I want a hacker who isn't afraid of the dark corners of the Matrix, and I don't care if they hack with a deck, just as long as they have real "sk33lz". And I want someone who makes me want to give them all my money when I meet them face to face because there is nothing worse than solving a problem with a hammer when a smile would have done. If you have a team that can cover all these areas with competence, read on. If not, again, please cancel the connection contract and move on.

Now for the biggest issue. I am a Monad. A month ago you would have called me a head case, but I've accepted these new players and the identity they've provided. I'm not some infection-spreading viral, and I have never copied myself. I'm a blend of human and AI, and I'm willing to live that way and avoid the cheats others may use. If you can accept this last aspect, make the call.

- Neutral should slap a header on this one, "Head case seeks corporate strike team to pose as bodyguards and abduct him."
- Kane

- Neutral is smarter than that. The Shield for this contract is probably high. Not just due to the requirements, but because of the client. Almost tempts me to go after him. Just for what seems a solid challenge.
- Thorn

Contract Handler: Fiddler43
Contract Principle: Darius Grant
Contact Timeline: 18/11/2077 Extended
Contract Payrate: ¥ ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Corporate Executive; Manhattan, MDC nightclub; night on the town
Threat Count: 8
Information: Mr. Grant requires a team of discreet operatives to protect and accompany him for a night out at The Red Light Lounge and possibly Club !?!, if the scene at the RLL is not to his liking. Contractors must be able to blend seamlessly into the locales and be consummate professionals. The Contract Rate is for a single

night of work to include early reconnaissance, pick-up and transport, internal club escort, onsite security, transport between clubs if necessary, and return transport and drop-off.

Mr. Grant is currently handling matters involving the loss of his father, Malcolm Grant, within the Boston Quarantine. These matters have made him a target for kidnapping, blackmail, and assassination in recent months as the courts weave through the thousands of cases of rights transference they are doing due to Boston.

Successful completion of this contract may increase potential receipt of future, and more lucrative, contracts.

- Grant's last contracted team, a group of rather bright rookies, got him out of a rough spot at Studio 74, went on to double their money backtracking the hit squad, and got a nice string of Manadyne operations to help Darius' position. This is a decent place for starter runners if they know how to blend in at a bar.
- Stone

- For every success there is a failure. Darius hired a team to get him over to Under Construction when he was visiting Seattle. Lost two for hanging out outside, one for making a run to save his teammates, and another two for not wanting to leave their bikes at his hotel. Not the premier team, but they only got him out because I was running rigger on the op and they got Grant into the van.
- Sounder

- Glad to know it was an actual pro who got him clear. Those glorified gangers had no place in the shadows.
- Balladeer

AVERAGE JOES

Contract Handler: Neutral99
Contract Principle: Elizabeth Dockens
Contact Timeline: Immediate
Contract Payrate: ¥
Open Form Data: Corporate Administrative Assistant; city airport of choice; immediate need
Threat Count: 1
Information: Thank you for this. I need protection and fast. I'm currently at Austin-Bergstrom International and able to fly into any major airport to meet a security detail. I will need at least 7 days of protection, possibly more depending on the outcome of several virtual meetings I will be attending. Wherever I am secured must have grid access with minimal interference available. The security detail needs to have a competent decker who can secure my virtual meetings. I need this to occur in the next few hours so that I can board a flight to my safe haven.

- In need, low pay, and posted by someone named Neutral99. This seems awfully fortuitous for Miss Dockens that her short-notice job just happens to have been tossed over to our datadrop.
- Bull

- We can definitely see how good the system is by looking for Jane Does in Austin or for some form of accident for Ms. Dockens.
- Glitch

- Obviously Neutral wanted a little extra exposure and maybe some help. In case anyone with a protective nature is enticed I got the following in a very quick search:

  Elizabeth Ann-Marie Dockens—Corporate Administrative Assistant to Cole Dunskirk, Lone Star Penal Division; 28 years old; mother in Houston, father deceased, younger sister attending Texas Tech, no current personal romantic relationship; studied criminal justice at University of Texas in Dallas after leaving pre-med at Baylor.

  It's not much, but it's a start to tell you who you'll be covering.
- /dev/grrl

Contract Handler: ZoneAngel777
Contract Principle: Father Abel Matthews, a.k.a. Father Abe
Contact Timeline: Currently open
Contract Payrate: ¥ ¥
Open Form Data: Catholic Priest, citizen of the UCAS; Southside, Chicago Metroplex, IL, UCAS; mobile personal protection detail
Threat Count: Unknown
Information: Due to recent events, I am seeking protection from more than just the Lord. While the Lord may protect my soul, there are forces at work in Chicago that threaten both body and soul. For this, I seek a group of morally stable individuals to act as my shield against the darkness. While I understand the wide spectrum of individuals to which this missive may extend, I would ask that those who respond please understand that I am a devout Catholic with a deep respect for life. While the wicked are often punished, it is the redemption of the flesh that can grant access to the gates of heaven, and the flesh can only be redeemed while it lives.

I plan to continue my trips into the former Chicago Containment Zone in order to minister the word of the Lord to those who are still bound to the life of the survivor. My security force will accompany me and protect me from the dangers that seek to silence the word. This protection detail must contain at least one person capable of extending themselves and connecting with the holy mana to protect us from the demons of that plane. The minions of the darkness within Chicago gravitate to the realm of mana.

- Word on the streets of Chicago is that Father Abe came across something more than just some souls in need of guidance. He supposedly witnessed something that could rock Chicago again. Rumors cover everything from bugs to a sleeping dragon to a wormhole, but the point is there are actually people actively asking about him.
- Frosty

- Who's doing the asking?
- Bull

- Chicago's shadows are nearly opaque. No one is talking about who or what they're working for these days. There's a lot of opportunity for work, but only if you know how to keep it on the job and not go blabbing all over the streets.
- Frosty

- Chicago's got its fair share of blabbers. They just all seem to be telling very different stories.
- 2XL

STREET GUARDIANS

Contract Handler: ElfHater420
Contract Principle: Sam Simmons
Contact Timeline: Immediately to 09/06/2078
Contract Payrate: ¥

Open Form Data: Corporate citizen; Detroit, MI, UCAS; daily escort required through hostile environs

Threat Count: Unknown

Information: Young corporate citizen in need of specialized protection in transit between residential complex and educational facilities. Route includes territory claimed by the Knights of Riverdale, an all-elven anti-human gang. Work includes pedestrian escort between the hours of 0715-0820 and 1530-1630 on most weekdays.

Deadly force is acceptable in the protection of young Master Simmons and is likely necessary when dealing with a dangerous elven gang that will be engaged on a daily basis.

True professionals only, please.

- Really? This is some corp brat that wants an escort to and from school. Why is this here?
- Clockwork

- Because this is open to anyone willing to register. This kid wants some help and has found an interesting way to get it. If I end up around Detroit I might look the kid up, for the lulz if nothing else..
- Kane

- Don't get too giggly. The Knights of Riverdale are an elf gang, true, but they are also connected to Knight Errant somehow. Didn't dig deep enough to pull the details but I got the surface linkage.
- /dev/grrl

Contract Handler: MadamAngel12
Contract Principle: C Street Ladies
Contact Timeline: 18/08/2077 Open
Contract Payrate: ¥ ¥

Open Form Data: Group contract; C Street, between 3rd and 7th; protection after recent violence

Threat Count: Unknown

Information: Recent assaults and murders that are being poorly investigated by local authorities have the professional ladies of C-Street seeking protective services from a small group of professionals to stop the violence. The ladies are willing to limit their operations to the four blocks between 3rd and 7th Street on C Street. This limit will likely increase the focus of legal authorities to this area and may require professional guards to ward off or warn of possible police presence.

Professionals will be paid in nuyen, but additional compensational benefits can be negotiated on an individual basis as long as payment activities do not inhibit protective efforts.

- This is an interesting job. A prostitute "union" looking to get some protection without going the pimp or gang route. The exchange-of-services model is quite a throwback as well. Good on you ladies.
- Slamm-0!

- I think that's enough to show us what's going on at the site. We can all contact Neutral and get full membership if we want. Don't forget to thank him for the sneak peak.
- Glitch

HIRING MEATSHIELDS

POSTED BY: ROOK

Glitch asked for a street-level look at how one gets into the protection game, and he asked me to provide it. There are thousands of stories and paths and I won't be able to cover all of them, so don't expect to find that here and don't belittle or make snide remarks on what I say. If you wanted to write this, you should have bought him a drink that night.

This is my view from the street up. I wasn't some megacorporate Personal Security Specialist that lost a big client, got blacklisted or tossed out of the company, and then had to go sell their skills in the shadows. No special training, no interning with pros, and no corporate backing. The "Guardian Angels," that's what the street calls bodyguards, I know came up through the school of hard knocks. But if you can hang on through the trial and error, there are some pretty clear paths into the world of being a professional bullet blocker.

As much as gangers usually seem like crazies out for fun at the expense of others, most of them are really there for a sense of family. That protective instinct and the loyalty that's present in many gangs makes the members feel safe. Those protective ones are a good place to start finding bodyguards. The instincts are there—they just need to hone them and apply them to something other than their severely codependent friends. This is a great place to start hiring low-cost bodyguards as long as you have an eye for the good ones and can tell the others, no thanks. And remember that you're usually going to get what you pay for.

Next step up gets the same loyalty, usually a little bit more class, but a lot of baggage. Crime syndicates, especially the Mafia and Yakuza, tend to breed loyal people. With their time dealing with other members of the underworld and a system that relies on respect, they are often better at knowing when to talk and when to stand around and look menacing. The key is finding the ones who can do the former among all those hired to do the latter. A dark suit, sunglasses, and a bulge in the armpit has been the menacing protection standard for a long time. It even crosses over between levels of protection. When it comes to private personal protection, though, it's important to get one that can stand around and look menacing but then drop the shades, crack a smile, and convince the local authorities that you have a legitimate protection detail and they need to go after the real criminals.

If you don't have syndicate ties and you aren't good at judging which ganger is loyal and which is loco, you still have a chance at finding some decent protection at street level. Visit your local martial arts studio. The specific art you pick doesn't matter—you aren't selecting out someone to fight for you, you're looking for protection, and while a "good offense is the best defense" philosophy works for folks with assets to spare, that is not your case. Once you've chosen the place, you have two routes. You can stand around and watch (this might get a little weird, but as long as you stay away from the kid's classes you should be good) or you can just ask the teachers in the studio. Looking requires a certain skill; remember that the most important thing you are looking for is discipline. You don't want the hardest kicker if he can't stand still when the sensei tells him to, and you don't want the glory-hound who lands a good punch and then gloats. You want the one who follows instructions without being told twice, who is ready before the class starts, and who bows deeply to the sensei but never lets his eyes slip down. Be careful going this route if you look seedy. The senseis aren't keen on losing their best students to a bullet that wasn't intended for them.

- It's a good idea to check out the sensei first. Some of them could be quality help. Some of them could be former corporate operatives and still sending info back to the bosses, or some of them may be still under corp contract.
- Icarus

- Another good spot to look is military academies. The recruits are young, but the seventeen- and eighteen-year-old junior and seniors are physically fit and willing to take commands. Get one solid operative and fill out a team with youngsters. Also good for getting those youngsters some real field experience and separating the wheat from the chaff.
- Stone

HIRING HITMEN

POSTED BY: LONGSHOT

First things first. Spend the money and get a real professional.

Now for the other info that Bull asked me to put together for those who aren't willing to follow that good advice. For those looking to hire a hitman, there are a few spots to start with and several dangers to always keep aware of unless you really enjoy serving time for a conspiracy charge. For those looking to get into the business, there are also pretty solid routes as long as you can meet the right people for the right work and not get pinched.

The first place to look for a hitman is your local organized-crime syndicate. There are different schools of thought on which syndicates are the best, and pros and cons to all of them. The Mafia offers lifetime criminals with a strong sense of loyalty, usually pretty tight tongues because rats don't live long, and an understanding of hierarchy. They know that they aren't the boss, and they'll take orders. Bad part is they tend to limit their

loyalty to the mob, and they often keep their tongues tight because their boss will bail them out or take care of them in the joint. Not usually the case with a hired gun. The Yakuza have similar positives and negatives with the additional negative of being solidly racist most of the time. Triads and Seoulpa Rings slack a little on the loyalty, but they gain points for ingenuity and an almost infallible aversion to ratting out their benefactors. These groups also tend to be small enough that you can make a deal with a boss and he'll send an underling. Extra level of deniability. Bottom of the barrel tends to be the Vory. They're violent, kill for sport almost as frequently as for profit, and are usually messy. When a trail leads back to them, there is no guarantee they won't just sell you out for a better deal.

Next spot to look is like a syndicate, but smaller and more street: gangs. They have some of the same benefits and disadvantages as the syndicates but vary in one enormous way. They're cheap. These are street kids that don't know the value of a nuyen. They blow their money on low-end fun, and therefore their money goes a long way. This is good for the initial hiring and also good because they can be paid to keep their mouth shut should they get caught. The more organized gangs, especially go-gangs, tend to be a better source for recruiting. Stay away from thrill gangs—adrenaline junkies are unreliable. Also, it's best to avoid hiring a ganger for work in their own territory, as they tend to find lots of distractions. And avoid putting them in the territory of their worst rivals for the same reason.

- Sometimes bringing people into rival territory can be useful, since it can help you conceal some evidence. A simple commcall or local tip that a rival gang member is on their turf can neatly remove a connection back to you.
- Thorn

The last source is the best but often the hardest to find: the classic lone-wolf sociopath. Those loners that always feel disconnected from society and people, but they still feel they need to do something to change the world. Shadowrunners often fall into this category, so looking in a runner bar would be a good start. Spotting them anywhere else is tough without some time. High school-age is a great time to target them, when they are young and impressionable, still think they can change the world, and don't understand the value of a nuyen. If you don't have time to scope out a high school (or if you're worried about appearing too creepy), just get into a good conversation with a social worker or counselor. While they aren't supposed to talk about the students, they might bend that rule if you play them with a few drinks. Here you're looking for the quiet ones, the ones that make the school worker uncomfortable are acceptable, but the ones that they feel for because they just seem like nice kids, are the ones you want. They know how to manipulate people already.

Thanks for letting me post this and remember—just hire a professional.

HIRING DUPES

POSTED BY: MR. JOHNSON

Who better to talk about hiring folks to do the grunt work than Mr. Johnson himself. Ha. I'm one of the many of us who eventually retired from the business. I knew too much, but I never wanted out of the game. Ares wanted me gone, now I'm here. Or was it Fuchi, maybe Aztechnology, or Wuxing? No, it was Sony! Doesn't really matter now does it? I'm on the other side, the same as everyone else, and now I make my living playing middleman of a different sort. It will never make me rich, but it keeps me in real food and a warm doss. I'm the guy who gives you the chance. I find the ones who need a new way to make a living, give them a shot doing something meaningless, and then send those who pass the test up the line. Those who fail either get another shot or die. I don't leave assets to waste. And that's rule number one when hiring dupes. Never waste a perfectly good scapegoat, decoy, double-blind, etc.

Second thing, keep it cheap. Never overpay. When you're hiring someone to play a bit part, you don't pay them like the a-list simstar. You should be able to get a whole team for what it would normally cost for a single skilled operator, and I'm not talking mage rates. This low pay does three things: It keeps them hungry for more, it keeps them thinking it's a milk run, and it keeps them looking like low men on the totem pole.

Next, keep it vague. Tell them nothing. These lackeys may hold a part in the plan, but they shouldn't know more than their part. If they start digging and find out, it might be time to move a few of them off the farm team and over to the major leagues.

KISS. Keep It Simple, Stupid. Don't send these guys on complex job. Need a distraction, hire them to start a brawl or blow something up. Need someone snatched, make sure that person is an easy mark. These are the lab mice, expendable.

Make sure you play to their strengths. Don't send the former accountant who asked the wrong questions to go shoot up a local bar and rile up the gang. Use accountants to do office work, like finding a file or infiltrating an office to drop something off. Use the last surviving member of the Screaming Ragers to go batdrek on the bar. You might not know a strength early on, but you'll see them after a few jobs and some well-placed questions.

My last two points seemingly contradict one another. The first thing I'll tell you is not to screw them over. They aren't the fall guys for the job. Unless they are. In that case, make sure they fall and fall hard. Nothing is worse than having a group of disgruntled employees—especially armed employees—gunning for you.

You have my suggestions, and now you just need to find your people. Well, that part is easy. Watch the news. Keep your eyes on the screamsheets for individuals who look like they're on there way out of some company or another as a fall guy. Security guards, office workers, and maintenance staff are always getting blamed and canned for something the corps want to sweep under the rug. If you can get them from a AAA, you can try and snag them before their SINs get the dreaded criminal label. The AAA will be writing them off and expecting them to become the burden of the local government, while you try and grab them and describe to them the glorious freedom of a life without a SIN—or with their old SIN with a few choice modifications.

If the news isn't filling your dupe quota, hit the area bars. Local bars near corporate housing are great for finding the sad and downtrodden. Start up a conversation and see if they are really in trouble or just upset because the new elf girl in marketing won't give them the time of day. If you're lucky they'll be there drinking away their woes *after* they've lost their place in the corporate food chain, but more often these folks will need a little extra push. Maybe even a little setup. Just depends on how bad you want them.

Last place to look is your local squatterville. The various rundown sections of your metroplex that have been the finish line for corporate expatriates for decades. I'm not saying talk to every squatter, but there are sometimes diamonds in the rough. Keep an ear out for those looking for work, especially those who are truly desperate. Ask around. You'll get pointed in the right direction, or at a local gang, or ghouls, or whatever.

Be careful. No matter how you're going about hiring these people or what you're hiring them for, be sure to remember that metahumans are still animals. When they're backed into a corner, starving, or desperate, they'll lash out at anything. Good dupe hunting!

KILLERS, SAVIORS AND HUNTERS

"That'll be thirty nuyen, please."

The burly ork eyed the pretty young elf as he transferred the proper funds. The payment ARO flashed three times, indicating a completed transaction. With a polite smile, she slid three extra-large pizza boxes with the six accompanying orders of ultra-cheesy breadsticks across the counter to him.

"Say, are you new ... Stacy?" he rumbled, leaning forward menacingly as he read her nametag.

Stacy stepped back. "Yeah, I, ah, know Vito's sister, Marie. I needed a job. He, um, took me on part-time."

The ork eyed her a few moments, his gaze intense. Stacy stood her ground, trembling slightly. Then the ork suddenly burst out with a bark-laugh that made Stacy jump.

"Well then, you'll be seeing more of me. Name's Chopper. Been giving Vito my nuyen for years, and I ain't stopping anytime soon," he said with a tusky grin.

Stacy smiled weakly as Chopper grabbed the boxes, his coat opening just enough to reveal the Warhawk revolver strapped under his arm. With a wink, the ork street samurai headed out the front. As the door closed behind him, Stacy's expression turned deadly serious as she sent a curt message.

<Target's on the move.>

Inside a Ford Americar parked outside of Vito's Pizzeria, a dwarf and a human watched the ork enter an Ares Master cargo-van.

<Got him. Cover your tracks, then we'll link back up.>

<Copy, rendezvous in approximately twenty minutes.>

As the Master pulled out, the Americar expertly slipped into position a quarter mile behind. Bell, the human, noted that the ork did everything possible to lose a tail.

But the RFID chips in the pizzas rendered his efforts moot.

"Hope he doesn't get hungry on the way, Bell," the jacked-in dwarf in the driver's seat said.

"Well, Jonesy, he'll be in for a nasty surprise if he does," Bell said as he cradled the AA-16 shotgun in his lap.

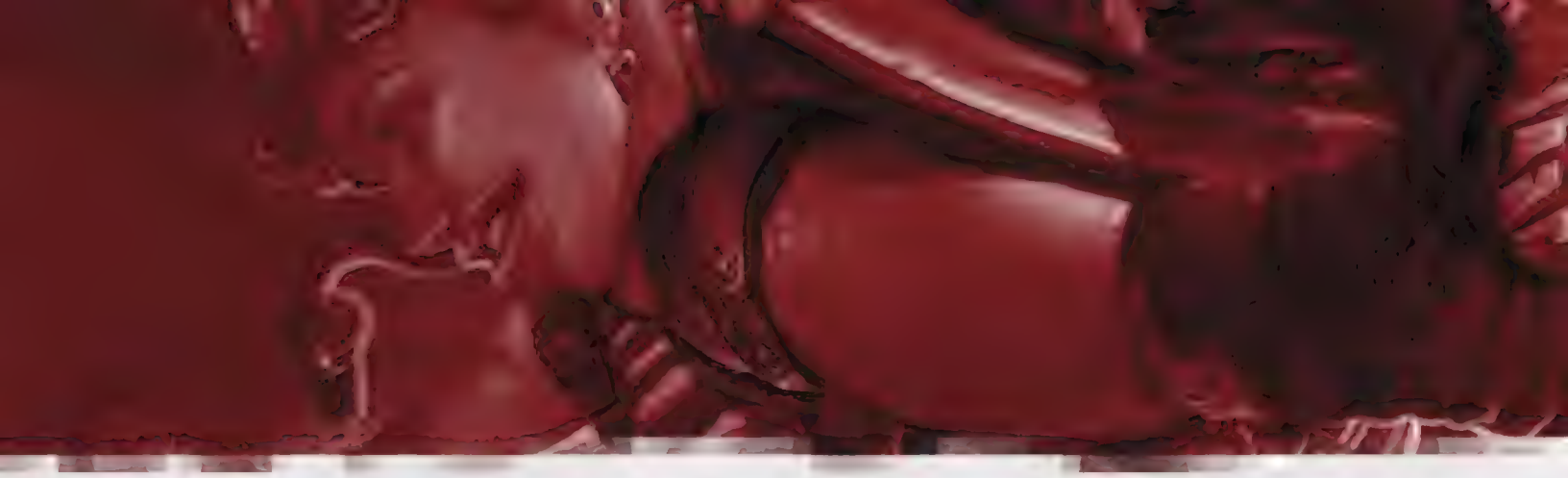
Ten minutes later, the Master pulled into a ground-level parking garage attached to an apartment building. As the Americar drove past, Bell shook his head. "So that's where they were holed up."

"How long you gonna wait?" Jonesy asked "Silver's gonna be mad if we don't wait for her."

"Yeah. But if we wait, they might find the C-12 she stuffed in their crust and breadsticks. She'll get over it," Bell said as he pulled out a remote detonator and clicked the trigger. In the car's rear-view, he watched as the second floor exploded spectacularly. Bell and Jonesy felt the resulting shockwave shake the Americar as gravity finished the other eight floors.

Bell pulled out his commlink and sent a message to Mr. Johnson, confirming that the runners who crossed him (and any potential witnesses) were now neutralized. A minute later, he received confirmation of payment to his secure Zurich account. Bell then sent a message apologizing to "Stacy" for not waiting and offered to make it up to her with dinner.

Her reply: "Anything but pizza."



WHO'S WHO IN THE MURDER WORLD

POSTED BY: ORKCE0

- A few weeks ago, Glitch approached me about putting together this particular section for all you fine, upstanding citizens here on JackPoint. And because I have a nice new hole in my gut that needs time to heal, I figured I have some time to kill. I haven't really posted much in the past eighteen months anyway, but that's because of the uptick in business. My company has dealt with some serious psychos and nightmares recently, and I have the fresh scars and missing body parts to prove it. I've also buried six good people, while four more have been enjoying their time off in private hospitals. But on the upside, it's netted us a ridiculous amount of nuyen along with some serious connections in both the government and corporate sectors. This means yours truly has gotten access to some high-level security files. So as part of my JackPoint obligations, I've decided to share some paydata on a few of the most interesting subjects. If anyone has any questions on specific individuals (listed or not), send me a message, and we can talk trade. Oh, and to everyone reading this, pay close attention. You may think you're nova-hot, but there's always someone better (or luckier) out there.
- OrkCE0

Let's face it—we all know that running in the shadows means that eventually someone, for whatever reason, will get a terminal case of dead. But I'm not talking about geeking a sec-guard in self-defense when a job goes south. I'm talking about those times when someone decides that, for whatever reason, another person needs to stop breathing. Corporations, governments, organizations, private citizens, you name it—they all hire such professionals to do their dirtiest work. The reasons for such contracts are too numerous to catalogue or discuss here. Besides, that's not the point of this post.

Given the current uptick in the murder biz (and make no mistake, it *is* a business and it *is* thriving), I thought a quick primer on the murder-scene's current wizards would be prudent. Consider this a current "Who's Who" in the wetwork/murder business, because in any profession, there'll always be the superstars. These are often the best of the best, the elite of the elite, the up-and-comers, or maybe they're just the most notorious (or luckiest) at the time. In our business, it's a good idea to know who the top dogs are in case you have to work with, or against, them.

- When you're building your rep as an up-and-coming killer, remember that clients can be very particular about how a contract is completed. Governments and corporations tend to not care about the particulars; they just want results. Others, though, such as criminal organizations, tend to want a more personal touch and may have specific instructions. These could range from symbolic gestures, like sending a dead fish or a rat to a target's associates, or an order to torture the target before they die. These instructions are often just as important as the outcome; disregard them at your peril.
- Balladeer

- Violating these orders can bring trouble. Most Johnsons, if you don't follow their instructions to the letter, might just dock your pay, maybe ding your rep. With these very detailed assassinations, though, the price of violating orders or missing a detail is high. During a particularly hazardous undercover assignment a few decades ago, I knew a sniper who was instructed to take out his target by shooting them through the right eye only. The sniper shot through the target's left eye, thinking it no big deal. The client not only had the sniper's eyes removed but ordered acid poured into the empty sockets until his brain was dissolved. To this day I don't know why the right eye was so important, but the message was clear.
- Fianchetto

In the murder biz there are three informal, but distinct groups: the killers, the saviors, and the hunters. Each plays a role in this sorry profession. I'll give a quick rundown on each group, followed by some summaries on individual subjects based on the various reports I've accessed. Most

of these reports are lean on facts, while others are nothing but pure speculation. The best killers out there tend not to leave much evidence behind or want their methods known. But their results are unmistakable.

Oh, and before anyone spouts off on why such-and-such wasn't mentioned, that this one's a poser, or some other bull-drek; all I have to say is: *too fragging bad*. I can't list every single wetworker, do-gooder, or metahuman meatshield out there because JackPoint doesn't have the storage capacity. And that's just the true professionals; don't get me started on the wannabes and posers. Based on the most current intelligence I have, the ones listed here are either considered top-tier or have taken the top spots on several Most Wanted lists; sometimes both. So if anyone has paydata to share, now's the time to do it.

THE KILLERS: THOSE WHO MAKE OTHERS DEAD

These are the fraggers who get their hands bloody, either metaphorically or literally. They could be the classic assassin who kills from kilometers away, or the wetworker who feels the spray of blood as they eliminate the target.

Like any specialist or professional, an individual killer's style, methods, and motivations vary. Some may be true professionals possessing a particular set of skills who see this as just another job. Some are motivated by something else. It could be an agenda, cause, or personal belief with killing being just a means to an end. Still others may be nothing more than psycho thrill-killers who crave the kill more than cred. Or they could be a fragged-up combination of all of the above. Like regular runners, no one in the murder business seems to fit into a single mold. But note one thing if nothing else: Each killer listed here has geeked a fuck-mothering lot of people to get where they are, and the fact they're still at large should say something. The rest are here because they've been able to thwart or take out some major hoop-kickers. Underestimate them at your own peril.

BALLADEER

- Yeah, he made the list. And so no one accuses me of any bias, I'll just let an audio file do all the work.
- OrkCE0

<opening audio file #1817-669.
Originator: Interpol Agent Ian Decker.
Subject: Randall Somersby, a.k.a. "Balladeer">
... according to our best estimates, the subject, known as "Balladeer," continues to be of special interest to Interpol after the murder of two Evo corporate nationals in London. So far subject has continued to elude capture and continue his activities as a freelance assassin. Classified as a generalist, subject has a wide range of skillsets that allow him great flexibility in executing his contracts. This has an added detriment to investigators, as it makes determining a specific modus operandi difficult if not impossible. Developing a pattern analysis of his crimes is equally difficult. The only thing consistent in his methods is that he is not consistent. In the past, subject has made use of a wide range of execution methods ranging from use of poisons to long-range shooting to strangulation. Note to self: Anecdotal evidence from the few witnesses we have been able to locate corroborated the small amount of physical evidence gathered from a London flat that subject was suspected to be using. This evidence points to the fact that the subject seems to prefer firearms as a primary weapon, especially long-ranged rifles. Secondary and tertiary methods are melee weaponry and martial arts, respectively.

These same witnesses describe subject as approximately 1.9 meters tall, Caucasian human, of medium build, with dark hair. Which, of course, describes a majority of the human males in the world. As of this report, the only solid means of identification we have been able to acquire is a partial thumbprint from the aforementioned flat.

According to records obtained, Balladeer is actually one Randall Somersby, a Confederated American States national. Former member of the infamous CASMC "Ferret" unit, subject likely learned most of his martial skills while in that organization. Given the highly classified nature of his service, further information-gathering has been difficult. Also, CAS cooperation with further inquiries and investigations has been difficult, to say ...
<END AUDIO FILE>

- Ah, Decker, you limey bastard. So close, yet so very far away.
- Balladeer

- Care to share with the rest of the class?
- Glitch

- Let's just say that if this is part of the file Interpol is using to track me, I've little to worry about.
- Balladeer

- So you're saying this was a complete waste of our time?
- OrkCE0

- Not completely—I got a good laugh out of it. But to show there're no hard feelings toward you for attempting to spill my personal data without so much as a courtesy call, I'll give everyone a little something. Decker was right about a few things—you'll just have to figure out what for yourselves. I did complete some work in London recently, but it was three NeoNET employees, not Evo. Just know that those pieces of shit had a hand in creating the CFD

virus. Killing them was a public service. Oh, and CE0, your guys did great work in Morocco. I was so impressed I waited until after you handed off the principle before waxing him. No need to taint the reputations of such competent and skilled professionals. Cheers.

- Balladeer

- Oh, you bastard ...
- OrkCE0

CHIMERA

One of the most prolific groups of freelance assassins in the world, the group known as Chimera has been operating globally for almost twenty years now and has racked up an impressive number of high-profile kills, including top-military officers, mafia bosses, and corporate VPs.

According to the most recent intelligence, Chimera's current roster is made up of mostly of former Russian intelligence officers. They're also thought to be almost exclusively human and to make use of extensive augmentations. Magic and/or Matrix support is used on ad hoc basis, although it's not clear if Chimera has any full-time magicians or hackers in their group or if they hire out from trusted associates.

The methods Chimera uses are as varied as their members. Sniper attacks, explosives, wetwork, and even pre-arranged accidents have all been employed in the past. This versatility has made the group difficult to track. Only eyewitness accounts (from those few who miraculously survived attacks) has yielded any useful information on the group.

Chimera's most recent confirmed kill was FBI Special Agent Seth Dietrich, who was working some kind of deep-cover assignment a few months back. Supposedly, he'd uncovered some damaging evidence against former Seattle Governor Kenneth Brackhaven. So someone called Chimera to make sure that paydata never got out. And it worked, sort of. As such, the FBI now has a special hate-on for Chimera and is looking to settle the score. They've issued several high-value bounties (for live bodies) for any known Chimera members; information on their whereabouts is also fetching high prices.

- Be careful around this group, my JackPoint friends. Not because they're a group of lethal killers, because they are, but because most of them aren't quite the same as they used to be. *wink-wink, nudge-nudge*
- Plan 9

DR. GUNTER VON BACH

Nicknamed "Puppet Master" by Interpol, this sick slag is a scary individual. Despite being responsible for an estimated hundreds of deaths, *Herr Doktor* hasn't personally killed a single person. Rather, he's created a secret network of brainwashed sleeper-assassins.

Once a celebrated neuro-scientist and psychiatrist in the Allied German States, Von Bach pioneered techniques to help individuals overcome addiction, with a special interest in BTLs. What no one realized was that instead of helping cure his patients, his so-called treatment was programming them to be killers. He would then sell the services of his patients to the highest bidder. Estimates say that some of his people have drawn prices in excess of one million nuyen.

For almost fifteen years, Von Bach's little business thrived. That was until a few of his clients got overzealous (read: stupid) and deployed some of Von Bach's puppets against some high-level managers from Saeder-Krupp Prime in April of 2074. The hit failed spectacularly, and two out of the four puppets were captured. From there it was only a matter of time before they were traced back to Von Bach. But before S-K agents could take Von Bach into custody, he'd fled the AGS.

Despite this, Von Bach's puppets continue to pop up, and the body count continues to rise. No one is sure if he's set up a new shop/practice, or if he's simply drawing from a previously established, hidden network.

Personality-wise, Von Bach is described as a stereotypical kindly doctor type who seems to be primarily interested in helping metahumanity. Recent investigations and interrogations of captured subjects now suggest that Von Bach is a pure sociopath who cares for nothing except the continuation of his research and the continuation of his streams of revenue. Von Bach was previously known to be a slightly overweight male human in his late fifties with thinning black hair, but authorities now believe that he has undergone cosmetic surgery and other procedures to hide his identity.

- Is there any way to detect and deprogram someone programmed by this wack-job?
- Turbo Bunny

- Who knows? I'd need more data on his techniques before I could even try and answer. But surprise, Von Bach took all that data with him. What I've been able to glean is that he uses a combination of hypnosis and a modified BTL-type system to implant a new personality, complete with necessary skills, into his puppets. He then embeds a special subliminal activation code, which is what he sells to his clients, that causes the dominant personality to take over. From there, the puppet reports to their new master for instructions and assignments. Which, come to think of it, is a lot like how CFD works. Frag me, I need to make some calls.
- Butch

- And we have no idea of how many over the years the good doctor has treated. Lovely.
- Cosmo

GROUP X

From November 2073 until about October 2074, a rash of fifteen murders occurred throughout Central, North, and South America. Despite the victims being from vastly different geographical locations and apparently randomly selected, they were linked by the murder method: ritual magic.

Local authorities, under orders from their various superiors, quickly falsified, whitewashed, and/or buried the results of their respective investigations. Official statements give causes of death as the usual accidents, the work of a deranged individual, or some other scientific technobabble; anything *except* ritual magic. Also interesting is that all of the departments, agencies, or security providers that have investigated this have gag orders of some kind in place, keeping them from sharing any information. Even some of my contacts, who are very well placed in various government acronym agencies, can't (or won't) talk about it.

The only reason I know this much is that one of my contacts hacked the field notes from two DIMR investigators, Jeff McGavin and Darren Rice. Apparently the DIMR thinks there's something to these murders. According to the notes, the DIMR believes that a ritual group, designated as "Group X" (coming up with cool monikers is not a DIMR strong suit), is responsible. The notes also state that "magical forensics indicated a similar astral/magical signature present at most of the crime scenes, with a few being too weak to identify, likely because of the passage of time." And as with most good mysteries, no one's seen McGavin or Rice for at least a month. They were last seen at the latest murder site, just outside of New Orleans.

- OrkCE0, please PM me ASAP.
- Winterhawk

Many here may think that this organization belongs in the conspiracy theory section of JackPoint, but there's one more bit of paydata to share. Last week, representatives from the DIMR, Draco Foundation, IOND, the Atlantean Foundation, the paranormal divisions of both Lone Star and Knight Errant, and a host of government security/enforcement agencies were set to meet in Denver. If I was a betting man, I'd lay odds on what they were going to discuss.

- Past tense. I can at least confirm that reps from the listed groups did in fact meet in Denver approximately five days ago, and that Nicholas Whitebird was also present.
- Kay St. Irregular

- I'm still sorting through the list of victims. They really do seem random. I'm trying to ascertain a pattern, but to be honest I'm not a detective. Anyone else what to take a crack at it, PM me and we can work something out.
- Sunshine

- So resident spell-slingers, got anything?
- Bull

- Just educated guesses. I'm leaning more toward the group theory rather than a lone practitioner. The amount of magical power necessary to pull this off would normally be too much for an individual to handle. Not to mention the challenge in getting a hold of material samples. All in all, though, the implications of what such a group could pull off is frightening.
- Lyran

- There're also better ways to kill someone. Whoever did this wanted their victims to suffer greatly. It's like someone wants to make a point.
- Elijah

- So basically all we have is that there may, or may not be, some powerful ritual group of serial killers offing people with impunity, a massive global cover-up, and the only ones who were able to uncover anything are missing? Super.
- Danger Sensei

- Sounds like a typical day in the shadows to me.
- Stone

- Update! Add one more to the list. Just got word that a victim with similar MO was found in Miami.
- Sunshine

RISER (2.0?)

Because of Riser's history as a former JackPoint member, I'll skip the usual background data on him and focus instead on what he's been up to lately. And yes, he's been busy.

Over the past year, Riser (or whatever passes as Riser these days) and a few of his associates have been waging a scorched-earth war against the Smoker's Club. They started with known contacts, associates, fronts, and other related businesses. From there, they targeted any known family and friends. Then, things got really ugly as the Club members retaliated. Bodies started piling up across North America and Western Europe. The real estate values in some cities took a nosedive because of the destruction; including several blocks of waterfront property in Brooklyn. Reports also indicate that longtime leader of the Smoker's Club, known as Yankee, may have been (but not confirmed) one of the Club's casualties during that incident.

The curious thing about all this is that Riser has taken little effort to conceal his actions. While taking out a known fence for the Club in Cape Cod, Riser went so far as to look directly into a security camera for approximately thirty seconds before smiling and walking away.

Similar incidents in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Texas have also been recorded, with Riser or his people letting bystanders record them.

- Yeah, and soon as the job is over, he becomes a ghost again. Sometimes, I think he's better than me in that regard.
- Traveler Jones

- Wait, are we sure about this data regarding Riser and the Smoker's Club? Something doesn't seem right.
- Bull

- Hey, I don't know Riser or the Smoker's Club personally. All I can do is forward what paydata I have, and this is it. I also didn't see the previous files "Riser" posted before I created this post.
- OrkCE0

- Yeah, there are some questions to investigate. The first one being, how much does the personality that invaded Riser talk with other versions of itself? And might they pass the Riser identity along themselves, for the reputation and street cried it brings?
- Sunshine

- Like his previous incarnation (or whatever we're calling it), this Riser seems to have retained all the skills the previous version had, which by all accounts were formidable. Who knows what new tricks this one has picked up?
- OrkCE0

- Does it include rising from the dead, after what Glitch said in the first section?
- Netcat

- No, but it very well could include faking his own death.
- Thorn

- I'm hurt that you don't think I was careful enough.
- Rigger X

According to an FBI agent assigned to the case: "Riser seems to have changed his methodology of late, preferring to engage his targets in close combat, either with the use of small arms, edged weaponry, or in several cases his bare hands." More than once, Riser has been recorded crushing a person's skull.

Currently, there's a 2.5 million nuyen bounty out on Riser and a 500K bounty on any of his associates. Riser is also currently at the number one spot on Interpol's most wanted list.

SNOWBIRD

For many years, the assassin known as Snowbird was extremely active in North America, knocking off several prominent Mafia capos and even a don or two while working in the service of competing organized crime outfits. At each hit, she would leave her calling card, a small white ceramic bird. Rumors and speculation say that Snowbird may have some kind of personal grudge against her targets, or just against the Mafia in general.

Then in summer of 2072, for reasons unknown, she completely dropped off the grid. None of her associates or employers knew anything about where she had gone. By late 2073, rumors began to circulate about Snowbird's demise. Some speculate that some bounty hunter had gotten lucky, or that the Mafia had finally decided to pay up on that particular tab. But on December 25, 2074, Capo Doug "Mad Dash" Asher from Milwaukee and his family turned up dead inside their home. Mad Dash was killed by a double-tap to the head, and a white ceramic bird was left at the scene.

Soon, other Mafia capos and soldiers started turning up dead in several major Midwest UCAS cities. But it wasn't long before members of the Yakuza, Vory, and even a few Triads started turning up dead with little birds left near the body. In a rare show of solidarity, the various criminal organizations are all now looking for Snowbird. Why she suddenly decided to come out of hiding and start so much trouble is unknown.

As of this post, Snowbird is still at large. Her skillsets are atypical of a professional in her line of work. In the past, Snowbird had preferred to go for the kill up close, using a pistol or knife to finish the job, which allowed her to leave her calling card. She has also been known to use long-range weaponry, leaving her birds in the sniper' nest she used for the shot. It should be noted that many of her recent targets have been taken out by long-range fire that hasn't been, according to several reports, as clean as in the past. Long-range shots have been to center mass rather to the head, which has left a few targets alive. Also, when a handgun has been employed, multiple shots have been needed to finish off the target.

Most of the major government agencies have been hands-off in this instance, but the various criminal organizations, spearheaded by the Mafia, are offering some very high bounties and rewards for Snowbird's elimination.

- Could Snowbird have lost a step or two during the time she was away? And what kept her away for so long?
- /dev/grrl

- Maybe it's not the original Snowbird—maybe this new one is a copycat or a successor.
- Mihoshi Oni

- Takes one to know one, eh?
- Kia

- What I'm about to say, believe it or not, I'm saying as both a favor to everyone here and Snowbird herself. She isn't responsible for the recent killings. All she wanted to do back in '72 was retire to take care of her child. That's right. Now, someone has kicked a hornet's nest trying to flush her out. Who, and why, I don't know. She hasn't lost any of her skills, so my best advice to everyone here is: Stay out of her way. Snowbird will do anything to protect her child. So if you want to interfere or try and collect the bounties, all I can say is "good luck."
- Balladeer

- So now you're dumping another's personal info. Hypocritical much?
- OrkCE0

- Like I said, this was a favor, one that I owed her. It would help if others knew to stay away and let her deal with this. But take it for what you will, I honestly don't care.
- Balladeer

SYNAPSE

If the Matrix weren't already dangerous enough for hackers, Synapse has upped the ante.

Three months ago, Grid Overwatch Division reps released a general BOLO alert to all government agencies and security providers for a new Matrix threat roaming around the grids. This threat, identified only as "Synapse," was said to be targeting individuals online with a potent combination of attack programs that work together to overwhelm normal biofeedback filters and fry the victim's brain and nervous system.

According to the alert, there've been nine victims total, ranging from a seventeen-year-old in Toledo, Ohio to a Renraku senior security specialist in Osaka, Japan. All were either hackers or high-level Matrix security specialists; one of them was a technomancer who freelanced for the Japanese Internal Security forces.

- Something GOD isn't sharing: Three out of the nine killed were demi-GODs. One was stationed out of New York, one from Geneva, and the last from Zurich Orbital. Yeah, that's right. Also, one of the deceased was a good friend of mine, an admin at the Asgard Data Haven. Anyone who provides me with paydata will be owed a favor by me. And I make my favors count.
- Orbital DK

- What's the deal with the kid from Toledo, of all places?
- Beaker

- He was an associate's protégé on his first solo run. He was working Matrix overwatch for some local smugglers and stumbled across something he shouldn't have seen. Damn shame—the kid had real potential.
- Pistons

Other than their profession, each victim was linked by a calling card left by Synapse in the form of an embedded line of code in the deceased's cyberdecks' main processor. The code forms a crude image that shows a brain exploding, leaving the bloody words "MORE TO COME."

Of course there's little information on Synapse. GOD publicly denies their existence, but internal memos indicate the belief that Synapse is a Matrix serial killer, an electronic Jack the Ripper. However, several of my Matrix contacts point out that Synapse is likely the work of a group or loose collective of hackers. Either way, GOD badly wants these jokers stopped and has placed several six-figure bounties on actual members or slightly smaller paydays on information leading to the apprehension thereof.

- Something about this doesn't feel right. The more I look into it the more something just feels wrong in the resonance, like something is actually clouding it.
- Netcat

- I was wondering what their opening move would be; very interesting. This might turn out to be a fun game after all. Thank you for posting this, I now have some work to do.
- Puck

- Why am I suddenly very worried?
- Bull

TEACHDAIRE

For the past thirty or so years, this elven assassin from Tír na nÓg has been causing nightmares in the shadows, and he doesn't seem intent on stopping anytime soon. Arguably still *the* top assassin in the world, Teachdaire is universally feared, and for good reason.

For many years, the Tír has disavowed any affiliation with the assassin, a practice that continues to this day. But recently, it seems that the prodigal son has returned, and he seems intent on burning the place down. While many global intelligence agencies surmised that Teachdaire had gone rogue two years ago, his current actions have all but confirmed it. In recent weeks, Teachdaire has eliminated three members of the Council of Stewards, while two more are missing. This has thrown the Tír government into a state of near panic as security forces have scrambled to protect the remaining members and locate the rogue assassin.

- Anyone want to take odds on if they've found him?
- Slamm-0!

- I believe the term "sucker bet" applies here.
- Fianchetto

Intelligence reports about this and Teachdaire's current whereabouts are sketchy and contradictory. MI-6 seems to think that he's still in the Tír hiding out, while the CIA and Mossad feel that he's already left the country and is letting the Seelie Court sweat it out before he starts with round two. Exactly why Teachdaire is walking this particular path is as much a mystery as the elf himself. Rumors abound and range from a massive conspiracy to a coup, and all the way down to he's pissed because someone killed his cat. Honestly, I'm not making that one up.

- He does love cats.
- Beaker

Because of his legendary status, most everyone in the business knows about Teachdaire and his capabilities (or at least the rumors), but to be thorough for the newbies and as a refresher, here they are again.

Thought to be the fastest metahuman alive (although it's debatable), Teachdaire achieves his legendary speed through several experimental delta-grade augmentations, courtesy of the Tír government, that have been consistently upgraded over the years. The use of extensive augmentations coupled with what some claim was an already damaged mind appears to have given Teachdaire a form of extreme psychosis, subject to abrupt mood swings. Reports say that Teachdaire can be kind and gentle to a person one minute, only to calmly (or savagely) murder them the next. The only creature Teachdaire appears to refuse to hurt is cats.

Teachdaire is known for using a custom sniper rifle for extreme long-range shots and a selection of pistols and knives for more up-close and personal jobs. His combat, tracking, and infiltration skills are also described as "near superhuman levels" and few in particular can match him in marksmanship. He's also been known to employ some kind of mind-altering technique and or drugs (such as laés) designed to remove memories from any witnesses (when he doesn't just go ahead and kill them). MI-6 in particular has been eager to discover exactly what these methods/drugs are.

- Well that's comforting to know.
- Chainmaker

- Even the most hard-core veteran shadowrunners and professionals agree: The best way to deal with Teachdaire is to avoid him completely.
- Thorn

THE WRECKING CREW

More expert saboteurs than assassins or wetworkers, the Wrecking Crew is notorious, even among other professionals, because of their complete disregard when it comes to collateral damage. The Wrecking Crew isn't afraid to literally drop a building on someone to get the job done (because they have, many times). Occupied or not, they don't care.

Most professionals use methods that result in what's known as a clean kill—meaning, the victim ends up dead, but very little damage is done to anything or anyone else. The Wrecking Crew's methods are anything but clean and often cause millions of nuyen in damages in addition to eliminating of the target. While various authorities haven't confirmed, it's estimated that the Wrecking Crew is responsible for destroying almost a dozen buildings, two bridges, and countless vehicles. While most of their jobs are made to look like an accident or structural/mechanical failure, the Crew has been known to use weapons such as rockets or missiles for variety. But powerful explosives are their go-to method. Because of the excessive damage they've caused over the past six years, the Corporate Court has issued a bounty of one million nuyen per member.

There are three known members of the Wrecking Crew, but detailed data on them is scarce. The first member is a human male known as Bell. A demolitions expert and structural engineer, he's thought to be a former corporate wageslave who for some reason went off the reservation. He's also the team leader.

The second member is a female elf known as Silver. Another demo expert, Silver is the one who's responsible for planting/setting up any devices and is also an expert infiltrator. She's also rumored to be an adept of some kind, and gossips assume she is romantically involved with Bell.

The third member of the team is a dwarf tech and rigger known as Jonesy. An expert pilot rated on multiple vehicle types, Jonesy handles the team's transportation, logistical, and surveillance needs. Older reports indicate that there was a fourth member, but recent intelligence can neither confirm or deny this.

- There used to be a fourth member, an ork merc called Rocker. He was a heavy weapons expert who liked to use rockets, mortars, and so on. But there was a falling out—depending on which rumor you buy into, he either made a pass at Silver or tried to cash on the Corporate Court bounty. Either way, it was stupid. Various body parts were found at the bottom of a blasted-out warehouse in Dubai.
- Stone

- Sociopaths, that's all they are. Psychos only out for money and their own sick thrills. They were recently in Bogotá, offering their services to Bright Star against Aztlan. But they were turned down cold and were told in no uncertain terms to get the hell out. They're the last thing that we need right now.
- Aufheben

SAVIORS: THOSE WHO (TRY TO) KEEP PEOPLE ALIVE

In the murder biz, there's more than just killing. People like me, often called shields, are the flip side of the murder coin. We're the bodyguards, security operatives, and general meat-shields (natch) who specialize in keeping others breathing. And with the multitude of ways one can be killed in the Sixth World, we have our work cut out for us, but at least there's job security. Still, it's a rough gig with an extremely high turnover rate. You're only as good as your last save, and if you fail (especially on a high-profile contract) you're *done* in the protection biz. More than one shield or their group has been blacklisted because they fragged up and their client got dead. Whether it was their fault or not is irrelevant. As technology and techniques advance, it's not enough to just put up tight security. Often one has to understand and think like a killer to defeat one. The battle of wits between killer and shield is an ongoing one, and paranoia is standard operating procedure.

DYNAMIC SOLUTIONS

- Wait, OrkCE0 is posting his company here ... as one of the top-tier protectors? Talk about ego. Since when did JackPoint become a self-advertisement site?
- Clockwork

- I've done the research. Dynamic Solutions is on several short-lists for various corps and agencies. Other JackPointers have talked about their work, so there is precedent. Deal with it.
- Glitch

- Thanks. But I'll keep this brief; I don't like to talk about myself too much.
- OrkCE0

In a nutshell, Dynamic Solutions (DS) is small troubleshooting and personal security outfit based in Miami. Personal security is our stock in trade but we also offer several options for one's security needs. But what sets us apart from more traditional methods of security is our proactive tactics. In addition to standard bodyguard services (a.k.a. waiting for someone to take a shot at us and then reacting), we proactively pursue any threat against our clients. Not only will we take a bullet for our clients, we'll have someone mixed in with the crowd or perched on a nearby rooftop to take out the shooter; usually before they get off a shot. In the past, we've sub-contract-

ed with various corporate and national agencies as well as protected several VIPs, celebrities, and government officials. The fact that we're still getting offers from these clients is a testimony to our work.

We also perform security threat analyses. During these contracts, we act as an advance security detail, scouting a particular area and determining what, if any, threats exist. If a significant threat exists, we either find a way to bypass or neutralize it. This often requires a great amount of legwork and covert movement. We're also contracted to do a lot of escort or "riding shotgun"-style jobs. Due to operational security, I won't go into details about our numbers and tactics other to say that we are more than capable of handling multiple contracts globally.

- Let me check my notes. Dynamic Solutions has sixty current field operatives, twelve down due to illness or injury. Thirty-two field support personnel—this includes technicians, armorers, riggers, magical, Matrix support, and so on. Eight administrative staff stationed in Miami. Currently there're teams operating in Berlin, Los Angeles, Morocco, and Seattle. You had a team in Manhattan, but they got waxed during that whole dust-up between Wuxing and Prometheus. Sorry to hear about that. Cost of doing business, right?
- Balladeer

- Pray we never cross paths again you ***<1.64 MP deleted by SYSOP>***
- OrkCE0

- Look, people, our paths are going to cross sometimes. Doesn't mean we always need to make it into a pissing contest.
- Glitch

OVERWATCH INC.

Considered legends in the private security business, Overwatch Inc. is the kind of group the heavy-hitters such as Lone Star and Knight Errant call when they need supplemental help. Founded in 2054 from smattering of various independent security-types looking to compete with some of the bigger security companies, Overwatch Incorporated (or just OI) soon became a force to be reckoned with. Since their founding, they've yet to fail on a contract—though their turnover rate is quite high, if you get my meaning.

Often called in to handle personal or temporary onsite security for VIPs or select groups, OI can operate in a variety of environments, from the typical suit-and-tie corporate gig to protecting a principle in a warzone.

- Okay, if they're so good and been around so long, how come I've never heard of them?
- Chainmaker

- A few reasons. 1) They don't seek glory. They do their job and that's it, even going so far as to dress like KE or LS when they're subcontracting. They'll even hand off the credit whenever possible, and the corp bigwigs love the free credit. 2) Many of them are former corporate operatives, often with good reason to keep a low profile. 3) Because of their rep, they don't have to advertise. All of their work is referral only. 4) They have a Matrix section that's very good at scrubbing any data indicating their involvement. This anonymity protects not only them, but their clients and offers certain tactical advantages.
- OrkCE0

- They're also completely dedicated to the contract or principle. OI was protecting some Amazonian big shot during the war while he was on an inspection tour of units at the front, including mine. They camped overnight because their transport was delayed. Well, this bigwig also brought along some entertainment. Several OI guys just stood there, with stone-cold faces, outside their client's bivouac acting like nothing was happening. Some of my people heard the screams and tried to intervene. Two of my guys were shot, but not fatally. Almost started a war right there in camp, but the OI OIC and I were able to prevent it, though barely. Come morning, we saw the results of the big shot's fun. Still makes my blood boil.
- Picador

OI's primary secret for success is simple: they've made paranoia an art form. If something can be used to protect a principle, chances are OI has likely thought of it, figured out how to defeat it, and come up with three more. A common joke in the biz is that OI hasn't met a security protocol they didn't like. If you go against them, expect multiple layers of physical, Matrix, and magical security—all of it top-tier. This is a company that regularly headhunts from groups such as the UCAS Navy SEALs, CAS Ferrets, Ares Firewatch, and even a few Sioux Wildcats. There are no slackers or second-rate agents in OI.

Their playbook usually has redundancies for their redundancies and contingencies for their contingencies. Even a small breach in security such as a ten-second check-in delay will set off an alert. Everything is checked out thoroughly, no exceptions. Shoot first; let the lawyers deal with it later is SOP for OI, as long as the client's protected. This may sound like overkill, because it is. But then, it's hard to argue with success.

- There's a reason they command seven figures minimum on all their contracts.
- Thorn

SHIELDMAIDEN

A high-level initiate elven adept, Shieldmaiden is a freelance personal protection specialist who uses a combination of Awakened abilities and physical disguises to fool potential assailants.

Shieldmaiden, a.k.a. Brenna Hansen (likely a cover ID), has been a freelance bodyguard for about seven years, following a ten-year stint as an Argus operative. Why she left the intelligence agency is unclear, but rumors suggest she was unhappy with management. After her separation from Argus, Shieldmaiden began working corporate security contracts, often protecting the family members of high-ranking executives or VIPs. Her usual modus operandi is to assume the identity of someone close to the client/principle, such as a friend or executive assistant, in order to obscure her real objective.

During her most recent contract, Shieldmaiden protected the daughter of a prominent Ares Arms R&D project manager in Boston, posing as the principle's best friend and schoolmate. In six months, ten attempts were made against the principle; Shieldmaiden single-handedly foiled five of them.

Despite her fearsome handle, Shieldmaiden is only 1.65 meters tall and looks to be about only sixteen (human) years old. Because of her extensive use of physical disguises, her physical appearance changes frequently. But she is thought to have several Norse-themed tattoos on her body, specifically her back and chest. While stronger than the average elf or human, Shieldmaiden relies on identifying and removing problems/threats before they become serious. Her adept powers are geared toward enhancing perception and reflexes. She is also an exceptional marksman with pistols and automatics as well as an expert in melee weapons and hand-to-hand combat.

- I "met" Shieldmaiden two years ago while completing a courier job in Boston. At first I thought she was just another waitress at the café where Mr. Johnson wanted to complete the drop. But before the transfer was complete, some slag attempted to geek Mr. Johnson. Then a kaf mug sailed out of nowhere and smashed into assassin's skull, dropping him. Before I could react, she was already hustling Mr. Johnson out, machine pistol drawn and scanning the crowd for more targets. For a second, I thought she was gonna plug me.
- Traveler Jones

- She was one of my better students. Aside from being quick in both body and mind, she had an honest and good heart (which is why I'm glad she left Argus) and a knack for acting. Taking on another identity was as easy for her as putting on new shoes. Her only problem is that she often loses herself in the part. I hope she hasn't let too much of herself slip away.
- Thorn

- Whatever part she's playing, it's usually flawless. I took a job as Matrix support for a group of runners on a snatch and grab for some corp-brat last year, and guess who was protecting the target, posing as her best friend? I've never seen someone my size take apart two street sammies and a merc like she did. Whole thing lasted 9.4 seconds. Also, the pink mohawk she was sportin' that day was wiz.
- /dev/grrl

THE HUNTERS: TURNING KILLERS INTO PREY

Many think the murder biz is only about killers and shields. Well, that's not entirely the case. There's a third group, one that I have mixed feelings about because they're the ones usually called when someone like me fragged up. They're the ones who turn assassins into targets. Trackers, professional bounty hunters, government/corporate agents, or whatever their official job title is, in my biz they're the ones who either bring killers to justice or eliminate the threat. There's a wide range of hunters out there, from government/corporate law enforcement task forces to freelance operatives who live by the "it takes one to catch one" credo. But just because hunters go after killers, don't think that they are automatically the good guys (if those words have any meaning). Hunters are often just killers themselves who got official sanction to kill. Often, whether an individual is considered a hunter or killer depends on nothing more than their current job or day of the week.

CHARLIE FOXTROT

There are some who are good and others who are simply lucky. Charlene Davis, a.k.a. Charlie Foxtrot (or as those of us in the biz call her, Cluster Frag) is an extreme example of the latter. A former Ares wageslave, she was fired from her office position after she wrecked an office floor. Security cameras show a comical cascading catastrophe that began when she spilled soykaf on a co-workers cyber-terminal, leading to her bumping a chair from another co-workers cubicle, which caused a middle manager to trip into a lunch cart ... long story short, fire suppression systems were activated, destroying tens of thousands of nuyen in office equipment and supplies. Tossed out on the street, Davis took a job with Tucker Bail Bonds in Detroit as a secretary, but soon decided to broaden her horizons.

Through what can only be described as a series of beneficial accidents, Charlene brought in several high-value bail jumpers, including Evil Evan, the (former) leader of the Motorheads go-gang. Eventually she left the bail bonds business and paired up with Betty "Moondog" Moon, a legit bounty hunter from the PCC. In the past three years, the pair has brought an impressive number of bounties. Their most spectacular was bringing in inter-

national terrorist and assassin Miles Sinclair, who eluded Interpol for over twenty years. Ever since that capture last year, Davis and Moon have been contracted by various agencies to help them find other terrorists.

- This was priceless. Charlie and Moondog were actually looking for another bounty, a low-level fence named Carl Spence. Seems Spence and Sinclair shared a particular hobby as Elvis Presley impersonators. Davis and Moon got a tip that Spence would be attending an Elvis convention in Las Vegas. Well, in the process of trying to apprehend Spence, Davis somehow brought a section of the hotel's lighting system down on herself, Moon, Spence, and Sinclair. Both bounty hunters were miraculously uninjured and they were able to pick up both bounties. I got copies of the sec-footage if anyone wants it!
- Slamm-0!

- Lucky? This woman is called cluster frag for a reason! I ran across her in Detroit a few years ago. I don't know how a person can live with so many accidents happening around them. And that ever-perky, overly enthusiastic attitude. Ghost!!! If it wasn't for Moondog, I would have taken a swing at her.
- Haze

- Yeah, don't mess with Moondog, who's a wolf-shifter BTW, and very loyal to Charlie. Moon is the muscle who keeps Charlie from getting into too much trouble. Apparently they met when Moondog was trying to track a rogue Sioux Wildcat just outside of Texas. Somehow, both ended up in a bar just outside of Fort Worth. Moondog had done her work the old-fashioned way and was ready to make the collar when in walks Charlie. She actually walked up to each patron and compared their faces to a clear-plas picture. She was about to get shot in the back of the head but tripped on another patron who fell into a waitress who dropped her tray of drinks on said Wildcat, ruining his shot. From there, things went to hell. Moondog tried to use the chaos to get the drop on the Wildcat, but he was about to get the drop on her until Charlie clobbered him with the aforementioned serving tray. Since then, they've been inseparable.
- Mika

- Charlie's a sweetie! She means well, but yeah, her sunny disposition and enthusiasm is best in small doses. That, and keep her away from any sensitive equipment.
- Pistons

- Any time an agency uses Charlie and Moon, they usually just give them the possible location of the target, point them in the right direction, and then follow the trail of destruction. Crazy thing is, it usually works.
- Sticks

- So OrkCE0, if this one's such a frag-up, why list her in this "Who's Who" list?
- Rigger X

- Because her dumb luck has personally helped me out, and despite the chaos that follows her, she and Moondog have managed to take some serious players out of the game. Oh, and partially as a warning. Like Pistons said, keep her away from any sensitive equipment like, say, top-of-the-line custom drones. She'll find a way to demolish them faster than a guided missile.
- OrkCE0

GREGORY BEAR-KILLER

To be brutally honest, this guy is scary as all hell, and the only difference between him and those he hunts is target selection. A human shaman of indeterminate Amerind descent who follows Wolf, Gregory Bear-Killer is a killer who hunts other killers (lot of "killer" in that sentence). He pretty much announced his arrival on the hunting scene two years ago when he delivered the head of escaped child-murderer/pedophile Eddie Raines to the Eagle Security's Sioux sector branch in Denver. Covered in blood and gore, Bear-Killer was almost shot by the watch sergeant. Since then, he's racked up an impressive number of collected bounties (seventeen, all dead rather than alive), with four from Interpol's most wanted list. That information is pretty much all anyone knows about him.

- I think I know this guy, or at least of him. If I'm right, he's the sole survivor of a Wildcat team that got caught on the wrong side of the Aztlan border while on a black-op. Once word got back, the Sioux Military disavowed the team. Rumor says that three were captured, with two later tortured to death in the typical Aztlan way. The third managed to escape, leaving a lot of carnage behind. The two-year time frame fits. If anyone wants to know more, let me know and I can do some checking.
- Mika

- A mage I often work with claims Bear-Killer has gone all toxic avenger. After seeing Bear-Killer's work first-hand, I don't doubt it. I gave up on two bounties when I found out he was already on the trail. It's not worth getting in his way.
- Sticks

In person, Bear-Killer comes across as a hungry animal aching to go after his next mark—though "prey" might be a more accurate term. While capable of composing himself in civilization, he displays a tendency towards sudden, brutal violence when provoked. And it doesn't take much to provoke him. His exact methods of tracking and taking down his marks are unknown, but

he has been known to make use of spirits of beasts (his pack?) and ritual magic. Physically, he's just shy of two meters tall and is all lean muscle. He wears smartglasses most of the time to hide what some have called "wolf-like" eyes.

Most contractors are hesitant to use him because of his violent nature and only call him when the situation is desperate. When Bear-Killer takes a contract, the only certainty is that a lot of blood will be shed. But few can deny his success.

- A shattered mind and wounded heart, his wolf thirsts for the blood of the wicked; that thirst can never be quenched.
- Man-of-Many-Names.

SUNNY DAY AND DAMIEN

Cassandra "Sunny" Day is a private investigator, former Lone Star detective, and owner of the Crazy Days Detective Agency based in Seattle. Originally from Savanna, Georgia in the CAS, she's considered one of the best magical forensic practitioners in the business, and her ability to find even the most minute clues, both physical and magical, has led to the capture (or elimination) of several high-profile murderers and killers.

- She's also one of the best astral trackers I've ever had the pleasure of working with. More than once she's used evidence she's recovered as a material link to trace back to the perpetrator. Last I heard, she's got a ninety percent success rate.
- Winterhawk

Before Lone Star lost the contract to KE, Day was the deputy head of Department of Paranormal Investigations' Seattle branch. During her tenure, Day cleared numerous cases, taking down everything from rogue spirits to wiz-gangs to toxic shamans. In fact, her branch was one of the few positive aspects of the Star at the time.

Set to take over as the next branch director, Day was forced to quit amid a witness tampering scandal in which she was falsely implicated. In reality, Day was about to blow the whistle on a group of high-ranking LS officers who were selling weapons out of evidence lockers. That conspiracy resulted in the death of several officers and a numerous civilians, including Day's sister. In exchange for her freedom, Day turned in her badge. Two months later, Lone Star lost the Seattle contract.

Despite numerous corporate offers, Day instead remained in Seattle and started her own agency. She also hired a bodyguard/partner named Damien—just Damien. Their arrangement is simple, Day handles the investigations and Damien makes sure her skin stays intact. Together they continue to clear cases, but this time for private individuals with the occasional consulting job for national agencies such as the FBI and even the Corporate Court.

- Last year the FBI brought her and Damien to the FDC to "consult." Long story short, she helped the G-men track down some alleged Black Lodge members before they could pull off some insane stunt.
- Kay St. Irregular

- She was also instrumental in helping me find the McCabe twins a few months ago. She was like a bulldog during that job, never giving up until we finally found a material link she could use. I think I still owe her a drink for that.
- DangerSensei

A high-level initiate mage, Day also holds a Masters' Degree in forensic science from MIT&T. Given her forensic knowledge, she primarily uses detection spells but is known to throw a mean manaball. And because of her Lone Star training and association with Damien, she's very proficient with pistols and various hand-to-hand disciplines. Damien is a former street samurai who has a taste for guns, fancy clothes, blades, hair care/skin products, explosives, and fine dining (but not in that order).

- Damien is quite the charmer, but don't let his cultured demeanor fool you—he's a street warrior at heart. Last time I was in Seattle, I ran into him at Dante's while he and Sunny were working a case. Some drunk piece of corp trash tried to hit on her (and who can blame him, she's quite stunning with that natural blonde hair) and pulled a knife when Sunny told him to frag off. Damien took the wageslave into the back alley through the back door. Without opening it first.
- Kat o' NineTails

- Even though Damien dresses like a pretty flower, Matt Wrath respects him, because like recognizes like.
- Matt Wrath

SHADOWRIDERS

During the 2050s, the Shadowriders were Lone Star's greatest open secret. While this anti-shadowrunner task force was never officially recognized by the parent company, their work left a lasting impression in the runner community. Utilizing the same tactics as their assigned prey, the Shadowriders were nothing more than shadowrunners with a badge. This task force saw success for over a decade but ceased operations sometime around 2061. In early 2075, a new group calling themselves the Shadowriders started operating in several Lone Star-contracted cities throughout the CAS and UCAS. This new incarnation operates similar to the old one, often targeting individual runners or runner teams. But they've also expanded on their mandate and have begun operating much like a Special Forces unit.

The only official member of the Shadowriders (or, as its officially listed, the Mobile Projects Division) is Captain

Nathaniel Granger, a twenty-five-year veteran officer with a list of credentials a kilometer long. The rest of the unit's true identities are a tightly kept secret; they're identified only by their code names on all official records.

- And before anyone asks, no, I don't know their real IDs. I got some access, but not that much.
- OrkCE0

The exact unit composition varies slightly and depends on mission parameters and personnel availability. Whatever the roster, they always deploy with a unit commander, magical support, Matrix support, at least two to three heavy hitters (usually cybered or adept combat types), a rigger, a sharpshooter, and some kind of mission-specific specialist. It's suspected they also have some kind of infiltration/undercover assets as well. During the few times they have to work with regular LS officers, each Shadowrider wears a custom set of light mil-spec armor that conceals their faces. At least one team has been confirmed to exist, operating out of Atlanta. Given how often they've shown up in other cities, there may be at least three to five teams operational.

- They're also packing some nice gear, all of it mil-spec SOTA, from what I've seen. The Star is sparing no expense equipping them.
- Red Anya

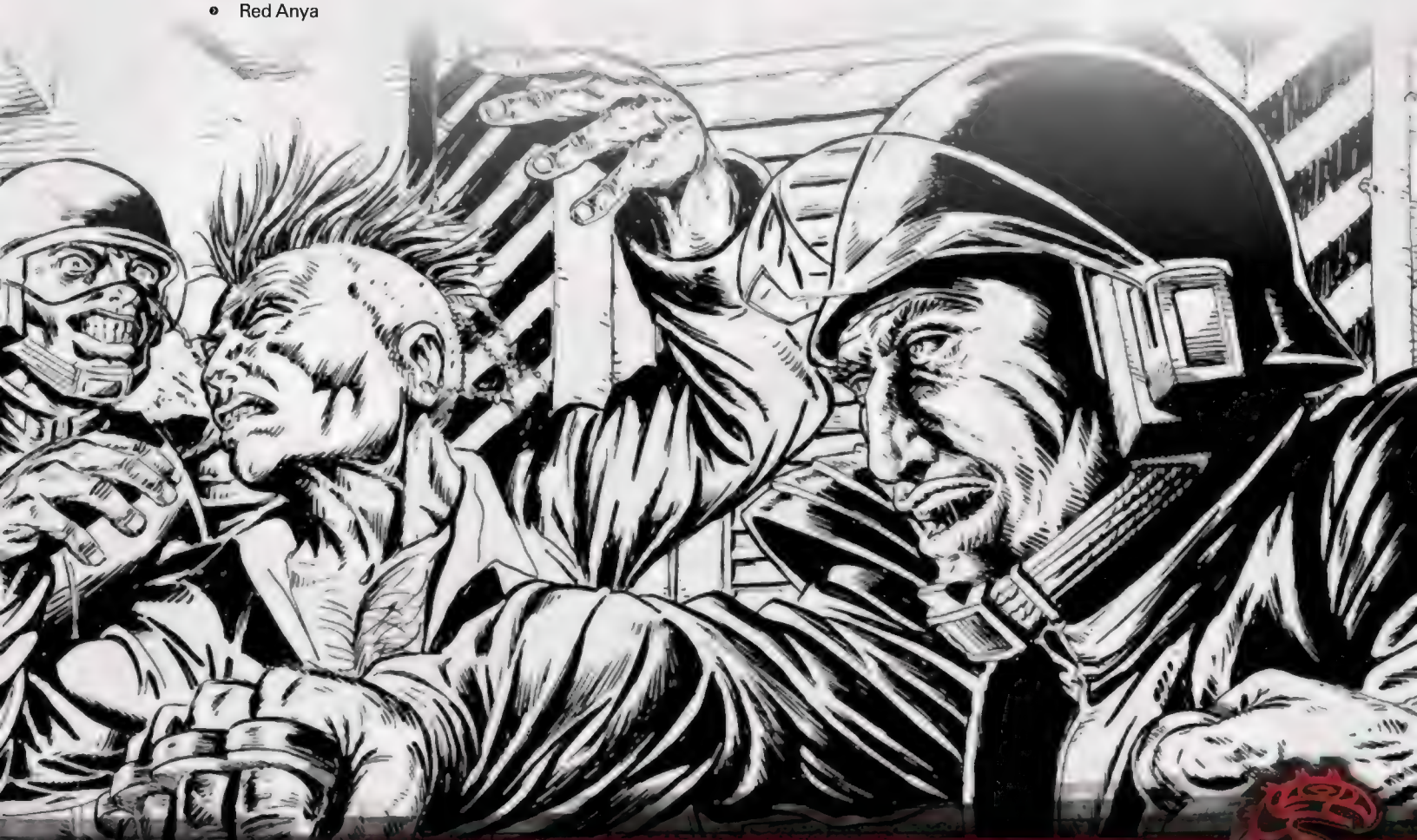
- I've heard whispers that part of the reason the 'riders have been reformed is that something big is going down within Firewatch and Lone Star wants to have a unit ready to fill the vacuum. Any truth to this?
- Bull

- Could be. Two months ago, a Shadowrider team inserted into the old Chicago CZ. This hasn't gone unnoticed by KE and Firewatch.
- Sticks

- I'm wondering though if they'll keep up the Lone Star tradition of metahuman head-bashing.
- Sunshine

- The Star has been recruiting heavily from the mercenary ranks of late. A lot of independent, top-tier Az-Am vets are looking for stable work.
- Picador

- They're also trying to hire select shadowrunners. They made me an offer a few months back, but I turned it down. I grew up dealing with the Star and refuse to stomach them now.
- Hard Exit



SLOW AND STEADY DEATH

It was moments like this that made Tortuga appreciate all the hours he put into researching and planning. Moments where he watched some street level hitter get pinched for something as stupid as carrying a concealed Lightfire 70 in his boot while walking past the wrong set of local guards. He knew the scans on that block, knew what would get you watched, what would get you pinched, and what would get you shot without a warning. It was all part of the planning.

He was currently on the sixth floor of the Casa del Lobo Blanco, innocently sitting on the veranda and watching the Havana streets below. He didn't look even slightly out of place in a classic Panama Jack hat, obnoxious patterned shirt, and khaki multi-pocketed shorts. He was blatantly playing the tourist in a part of town where tourists did those sort of things.

In their hotel. A hotel they never left. They would never wander the streets below in this outfit, with a light pistol tucked in their boot, trying their best to look nonchalant as they cased the hacienda across the street. Which is what the idiot did. There were so many reasons for that punk to get snagged, it wasn't much of a surprise that it went down.

Tortuga sipped the margarita he had sitting on the table and recorded the whole thing with his implanted recorder, also capturing thousands of stills—the city the ocean, or whatever—with each rotation of his head. All of those were sent to his headware. He would download them later and get a solid layout of the hacienda along with guard placements and movements. He would even spot a few of the guards trying to blend in on the street, especially if another low-class professional tried to sneak a peek.

He wasn't the only professional in the area. He'd already noticed the drone buzz by several times, each time sporting a new electropaint scheme and AR icon, but never changing the crack in its lower fin. He couldn't ID an owner of that particular drone, but the list of people working in Havana with that kind of technical expertise was a mere handful. No matter which one it was, that was one more competitor on this contract, something Tortuga wasn't keen on. Slow and steady only wins the race when you know the speed of your opponents.

"Another one, El Jefe."

"How many of these cockroaches are going to crawl out of the woodwork for this damn contract?" El Jefe asked angrily in Spanish, emphasizing every hard syllable of *cucaracha* to show his opinion of the assassins.

"Security is tight. No one will get to you," Juan Carlo, his contracted head of security, assured. El Jefe added the unspoken addendum in his head: "While you are paying us."

"Is this one talking?"

"Not yet, El Jefe. None of them break quickly."

"Have you offered money, as I suggested?"

"I understand your thinking, but these assassins follow a code.

BY SCOTT SCHLETZ

They would forfeit any future contracts if they sold out to a mark." Juan Carlo ended the sentence with a hint in his voice of another option.

"I won't just sit here and wait until someone puts enough money into one of your men's pockets to make them look the other way." Even though he had many years on the street, El Jefe wasn't aware of how far over the line he had just stepped.

"My men are all professional escudos. They are above reproach. While you may live and work among the honorless scum of the streets, the true professionals of the world live and die by their code of honor. While you think the solution to every problem is to buy the allegiance of your enemy, they have no allegiance to be bought. Only a contract to fulfill."

El Jefe took in the recriminating speech while pacing across his office. The movement was going to take him too near the window. Without command or instruction, Tarik, one of the dozen *escudos* under contract, shifted naturally to redirect El Jefe's path and be close enough to obstruct a shot coming from the window. It was one of hundreds of tiny things that these professionals did that kept their principles alive without most people noticing what they were doing.

"What do you suggest?" El Jefe asked, finally responding to the inferred question.

"In my profession we often become acquainted with both sides of the business. Know thine enemy and all that," Juan Carlo said. "If you want to use your money to stop this, place contracts on the contractors."

"Is that possible? I thought there was some kind of code among assassins. They don't kill their own."

"I can spread a small sum around to get the name of any known contractors in town. Once we have the names, I have an individual you can contact. Enough of those jobs get collected, on and no one will want to collect on you." Juan Carlo paused briefly. "Unless the source of the contract bumps up the price on you. It's a dangerous game."

"Let us play. Spend the money and get me as many names as you can. I will turn these rabid dogs on each other."

The smile never touched his eyes despite the accompanying laughter. Tortuga sat at the end of the bar, nothing behind him but the bathrooms and back door, and flirted with the slightly overweight, middle-aged, corporate housewife down at the bar looking to boost her waning self-esteem. He was doing a good job of feigning interest in her latest workout craze and delivering the appropriate flattering comments between her glasses of white synthfindel.

She wasn't his original plan for a cover. Tortuga was going to play the drunken tourist tonight, but this was better. He split his attention, ten percent to keep the vapid corpwife on the hook, and the other ninety percent to try to figure out who else in the bar was here after a contract.

He had completed all necessary recon two days ago, but a little birdie had told him there was a price on his head. He wasn't alone in being targeted, either. Several other professionals were in the crosshairs. Though their code prevented anyone from revealing who was paying the contracts, Tortuga was pretty sure he wouldn't need more than one guess. Carlos de Guevara de Castro, a.k.a. El Jefe, was playing a little offense. It was a move Tortuga appreciated and had expected to occur earlier with Juan Carlos as his professional shield.

The delay had thrown him off his pace. And now, instead of wrapping up the hit, he was hanging out at a bar trying to play Spot the Hitman. There were over a hundred people in the crowded bar, most there with groups of other corporate tourists or friends. He made quick scans to confirm everyone was part of the group and not a new addition trying to blend in, finding two new additions to keep an eye on. Those, combined with the ten other possibilities among the solos, pairs, and small groups, gave him an even dozen people to watch while emptily engaging in trivial banter with Claire, the aging corpwife.

One of the possibles broke off from his group and headed for the bathrooms. It was a good chance to create an opening. Tortuga ordered another double, which the bartender was slyly filling from a bottle Tortuga had given him earlier in the day, and Claire another white synthfindel before excusing himself for the restroom.

The bathrooms were spacious and clean. Four stalls, seven urinals, and six sinks were the utilitarian portions of this black marble, steel, and glass haven of excretory necessity. He passed a middle-aged corp suit, dressed the part of a Havana tourist but identifiable by his watch and sunglasses, both rewards for years of corp service, and spotted his potential hitman at the urinal in the corner. He passed at least five open urinals to get to that corner spot. Even if that corp suit had been smack dab in the middle of the wall, the corner was one urinal farther than the customary urinal gap men gave in open restrooms.

Tortuga went for the stall. Furthest from the pissing potential hitman. After sliding the lock into place he quickly slipped under the wall of the stall to the next spot over. He gave a quick glance and saw his target turning and heading away from the corner but had to quickly use a little stall gymnastics to balance up off the floor. He listened to the footsteps, trying to ascertain clues to any actions that might be going on other than walking. When the steps stopped and the water started Tortuga eased up a bit on the vice grip he had on the bootknife that was already half unsheathed.

There was no warning when it came. It wasn't a movie, no dramatic cocking sound or ninja-like "hiya" preceded the hard crack of boot on stall door. Short bursts of chuffing followed, then clicking as the silenced SMG tore up the empty stall.

Tortuga had to act fast. He had premium reflex 'wares, but he never left them on in social situations. Even the instant of mental effort it would take to send the electrical impulse to activate them was more than he could spare now. Instead, he dropped to the floor, planted both feet on the stall wall, and shot himself along the floor under the other two stalls, pulling the knife as he extended his legs.

Tortuga knew what came next. He stopped himself just past the last stall wall, did a quick kip up, and then jumped up to hang from the side of the last stall. He could picture the other hitman—obviously not a veteran or he wouldn't have taken a shot without a clear plan—as he ducked down and scanned under all the stalls. He counted to three, enough for the other guy to see no feet and stand back up, and then lowered his feet to the ground.

Tortuga took the crouched pose and watched his mark, the tides were now turned. The other man was not leaving alive. The dead man walking slowly, stepping from stall to stall, using the barrel of his SMG to push the stall doors. It was a smaller model, possibly even one of the micro-Uzi Vs that had been popping up all over Havana in the last month. The model didn't matter, though. Only the distance.

Tortuga moved as the last stall door began to open. It was a single step and a flick of the wrist that ended it all. Nothing flashy. One moment the aspiring assassin was carefully and methodically clearing the stalls, the next he was contemplating a motion in the corner of his vision just before the ten-centimeter dikote blade slipped through his temple and stopped all thought.

Tortuga caught the body before it hit the ground, hauled it over to the last stall where all this had started, and dropped him unceremoniously onto the toilet. The stall was a disaster, but most of the damage was limited to the back and side walls. The latch on the door was damaged, but Tortuga had a plan for that. He quickly removed the dead killer's belt and wrapped it around his waste, looping it around the pipes of the toilet along with his waist. Tortuga stuffed both of the dead man's hands between the space in his legs and into the toilet. The move would keep blood from running down an arm onto the floor once he removed the knife, which still jutted from the temple of the dead assassin. The door of the stall was the last issue and was handled by a simple chunk of wood from the damaged wall, wedged into the gap of the next stall and preventing the door from swinging in.

Tortuga finished by yanking out the knife, wiping it on the dead man's pants, and rolling out of the stall. He snatched the dead man's gun, washed his hands, and checked himself in the mirror.

He was back at the bar in under two minutes total. Claire was happily accepting their drinks, and she laid a very suggestive hand on his thigh as he sat down.

"They found another one dead at La Bellero. No one has come forward to collect, so I presume it is another victim of El Tortuga and not the man himself," El Jefe said.

Juan Carlos stood nearby with an expression of pained restraint. He wanted to speak, but he knew it was not his place. It was always hard to admit when you were wrong.

"What? No comments from my security. I thought you'd be happy with the loss of another potential assassin," El Jefe said.

"El Jefe, I think we may have made a grave mistake. The efforts we have put in place have definitely thinned the pool of assassins in Havana, but it has also provided Tortuga with access to their recon information. Tortuga is becoming a greater threat with each death." Juan Carlos let his eyes fall.

"He is the only assassin still coming after me. No matter what he knows, your job is easier."

"In my profession an informed enemy is the deadliest foe. We will tighten security for this evening, and a transport will be prepared for the morning. We'll get to the dock before sunrise and sail for Key West."

"So you want me to run. I am El Jefe. I will not run."

"You are paying me to protect you. Your Havana hacienda is no longer a viable location to maintain security. Your home in Key West already has an advance team on site. This is not a request."

El Jefe's only response was silent assent through gritted teeth.

Tortuga tried to focus. He had the ideal location, the perfect shot, and three fully laid-out escape routes, along with two back-up routes. This was the moment of truth—but all he could think about was how he somehow ended up taking an assassin back to his room with him, thinking she was a simple desperate corpwife.

Claire hadn't missed a beat that first night. She flirted, played coy, and then ended the night with a little flirty, half-reluctant come-on. She played a great guilty corpwife, pulling away from him at the last minute. Earlier tonight, while Tortuga was working a second bar, she strolled in and plopped down at the bar in a much more somber mood. She ordered synthwhiskey instead of synthfindel and had three shots down before she "spotted" Tortuga at the end of the bar. He gave her a little smile and a toast with his glass, and she gave a half-hearted smile in return and went back to drinking. Another three shots led to a trip to the bathroom, where she stumbled into him as she tried to pass. Tortuga helped her to the bathroom door, waited for her to get out, and then directed her to the seat next to him. He ordered water for her, along with some doughy pretzel things from the kitchen to soak up some alcohol. Then he got her sob story. The husband had accused her of doing exactly what she was doing the night before, then ranted for a while about his own desirability, and then storming off.

The whole thing was a line and a hook, and Tortuga took a solid bite. She sobered a little, she played the wounded ego card, and she invited him to complete the tale her husband had already spun.

Tortuga was under her, naked and very distracted, when she popped the spur from her palm and tried to jam it into his heart. The neck would have been a better option, and probably successful, since her petite frame, though muscular, didn't have the power behind the blade to punch through Tortuga's thick Evo Ironhide orthoskin and Spln Unbreakable titanium bone lacing. Her spur jammed on his breastbone, and her skull didn't respond well to his titanium-laced knuckles. A second punch followed the first, and eventually her mangled face lay on a pillow, unrecognizable and exceptionally dead.

She had tricked him. She would have killed him were it not for his 'wares and her inexperience. That was unacceptable. A mistake. That's what he couldn't let it go.

With the error heavy on his mind, Tortuga lined up the shot using every bit of data he had gathered. He couldn't see El Jefe, but he didn't have to. He had the information he needed.

At the perfect point in his breath, he eased the trigger back and unleashed fate.

Armored glass screeched when pierced. Human ears burst when struck by a round moving at 900 m/s. Feather pillows exploded when hit by a ten-gram slug.

El Jefe awakened when the feather pillow next to his head exploded.

The series of events was completely secondary to El Jefe until his mind heard the screech only a moment before the air was filled with down feathers. The guard whose ear had burst was best described as unphased. He had a large pistol out and ready in one hand; his other hand was already helping El Jefe out of his bed. He was calling on the radio that the principle was under attack, all calm and professional.

El Jefe was not calm.

"What the hell are you doing? Fire back. Get that son of a bitch," he yelled at the guard as he pulled him from bed and into the hallway. El Jefe was unceremoniously dragged through the hallway while chatter exploded over the radio and gunfire exploded all around the hacienda. Neither the chatter nor the gunfire was indiscriminate. Rounds were being fired at the hotel across the street. Not at every room, but at one specific room, where the shot had to have come from. The chatter was concise. Modified plans and movement details. El Jefe couldn't hear it, but Juan Carlos was directing everyone with the precision of a neurosurgeon. Fire to suppress the shooter, gaps to allow another shot to reconfirm a location, instructions on moving El Jefe, commands to prep vehicles, messages out to request drone support, calls to inform the local police of the issue. It was the coordination of a true professional.

The hallways El Jefe was pulled through were a familiar blur. He had lived in them for years, but the speed and chaos made them strange to him. The floor had far more scratches than he remembered, and the wood seemed darker . They were obscure and unimportant details, but it was what he noticed.

The wood of the house gave way to the dirt of the drive as he was shoved into the back of a large van. Once inside he recognized the shape and fittings of a Citymaster. Five more pairs of uniform sunglasses were in the back with him alongside Juan Carlos and whichever body-shielding thug had been in his bedroom when the chaos kicked off.

"We're headed to the docks. The event was an hour ahead of schedule, but we can adjust. We'll have you on your yacht in twenty minutes and in international waters before sunup. Tortuga failed," Juan Carlos said everything but the last two words with professional calm. Those he spat in disgust.

Tortuga moved down the back stairwell through route two. Route one was compromised by excessive bullets in the air. He paused at the door into the rear stairwell when an incoming message ARO popped into his field of vision. It was a contract message.

"Mark: El Jefe, a.k.a. Carlos de Guevara de Castro. Contract Status: Fulfilled. Payment en route. Cease efforts."

Tortuga expended a tiny bit of effort to open his work account and found the message true. What he suspected was some kind of ploy by a hacker in El Jefe's employ instead revealed a significant increase in his account balance. He ordered the sum moved immediately—standard operating procedure—and then calmly stepped out into the back alley. A dozen steps later he was blending into the sparse traffic on the Havana street. Five minutes later he was a ghost in the wind.

HAVANA: DALE A TODO METER!

/dev/grrl could feel the brisk breeze whipping her hair across her face as the boat slowed to enter the Canal de Entrada that led into the Port of Havana. The same wind molded the flowered sundress to her body, the hem popping and snapping behind her, but she couldn't feel it through her skintight body armor, artfully tinted to blend invisibly with her natural tones. To her left, portside, modern warships of the Caribbean League Navy—high-speed littoral cutters—lay at anchor beneath Morro Castle. To starboard, Castle San Salvador rose above a marina brimming with luxury yachts. For centuries the two fortresses had guarded the vital channel between them against pirates and invaders, but now they were little more than photo ops for tourists.

Keeping one eye on the world around her, /dev/grrl opened an AR window—hidden by her stylish shades—in front of the other and reread Kane's message: "I need your expertise for a special task. Come to Havana. Order a bad mojo mojito at the Floridita. I will contact you." Not the strangest request from Kane—base-jumping onto a passing airship still held that title—nor the most cryptic. But it was unusual for him not to dispatch one of his crew—usually Scrimshaw or Dread Pirate Tim—to bring her in. Something different was up. The thought made her grin. She watched as the boat docked at the ferry terminal on the Old Havana side.

A swarm of three-wheeled scooters festooned with festive lights crowded the barricades protecting the passenger ramp at the Old Havana ferry terminal. The AR agent tagged them as cococabs and informed her the minimal shell barely shading the back half was meant to protect two passengers from the elements. The drivers stood next to their vehicles, calling out deals and promises to the disembarking passengers in a patois of Spanish and English.

"Pretty Lady! Aqui!"

The driver who caught her eye was young, not handsome but healthy, with no visible augmentations. More important to /dev/grrl was the immaculate condition of his aged cococab. She appreciated professionals who maintained their equipment.

"You want to see Revolution Square? Tropicano? Maybe Finca la Vigia—Papa Hemingway's home?" He held his straw hat over his heart in a show of sincerity. "For fifty nuyen I, Antonio, will carry you flawlessly anywhere in Havana."

"Forty," /dev/grrl countered. Antonio's beatific smile told her she should have offered half that price. "Do you know where El Floridita is?"

"Si, si!" Antonio handed her into her seat before taking his own, his knees straddling the engine.

/dev/grrl divided her attention between the grid and the passing streets as Antonio's "wonders of the Pearl of the Caribbean" patter washed over her. Even so, she didn't spot the tail until they were passing El Capitolio, which both Antonio and her AR informed her was now an academy of science. There was a "hole" in the bright cloud of adverts and agents filling the wireless with enticements intended to lure tourists away from their money. She was being followed by someone keeping their commlink dark. Looking over her shoulder, she saw a cococab with a single passenger of indeterminate size and gender, dressed too warmly for the climate.

"Hey, Antonio," she interrupted the cheerful sales pitch. "Can you lose that cab behind us? The one with the blue flags? His passenger is a real pain; a guy who won't take no for an answer."

Antonio glanced back at the other cab.

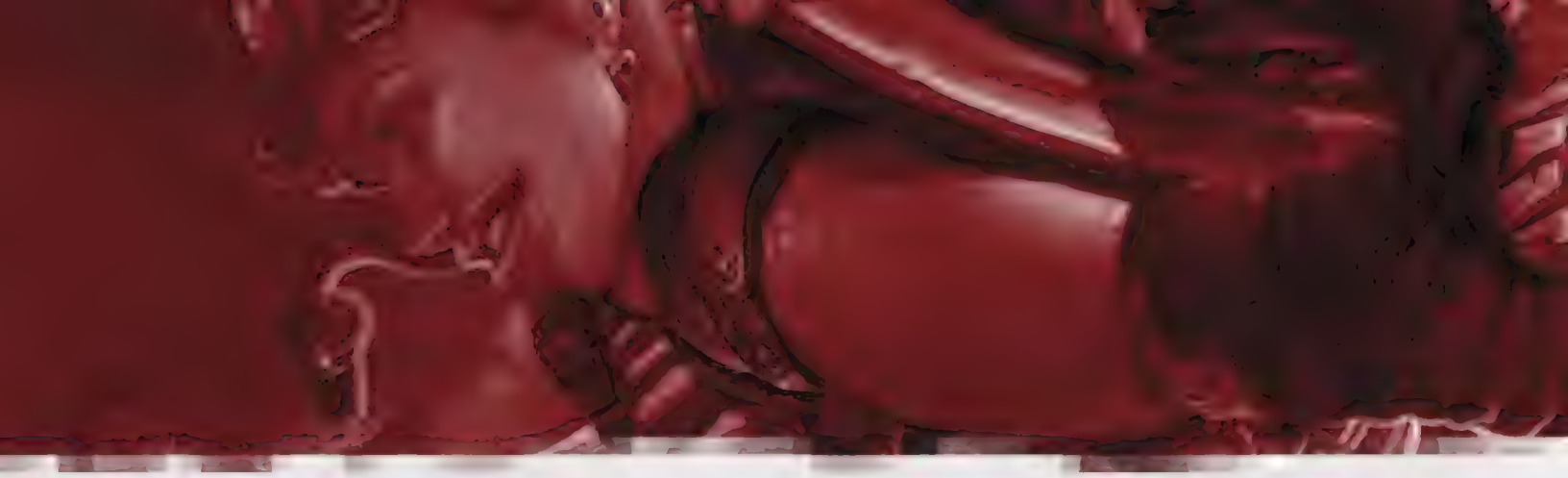
"Louis is hard to lose; one smart cabbie." He grinned. "But I can give you first class UCAS car chase for 400 nuyen."

In no mood to haggle, /dev/grrl transferred funds to the cococab's meter. Then she scrambled for a handhold as Antonio threw the three-wheeler into a turn that almost rolled them. For several minutes the tiny cab hurtled down alleys, across busy streets, and through a half-dozen private yards before pulling into a cramped loading dock. /dev/grrl could tell from the signage that they were in Chinatown, but exactly where and how they'd gotten there was a mystery.

"That's Parque El Curita," Antonio pointed to greenery visible at the far end of the alley. "Cross that to Simón Bolivar, then go west to Rayo, about a block. Left on Rayo and El Floridita is on the right."

"You're not taking me there?"

"Louis will catch up soon. I will lead him on UCAS goose chase."



The park was an open plaza ringed by trees—not enough cover for /dev/grrl's paranoia. Trusting her commlink to lead her the few blocks to El Floridita, she skirted the open space, ducking into alleys to avoid the busy streets. As nearly as she could tell, no one was giving her a second glance, much less following her.

In the second alley, a man hurrying in the opposite direction bumped into her. When she turned to look, he threw a handful of powder into her face. She tried to exhale without inhaling—a vain effort to keep the dust out of her nose and mouth as she reached for her pistol. Fumbled for her pistol—her hand felt numb and distant. She fell backwards into someone's arms. She was vaguely aware of being dragged across a threshold, but she couldn't keep her eyes open enough to see where they were taking her.

"A tourista!" a voice hissed. "Are you loco? No one will buy a hot zombie!"

"A bocor from the House of the Red Hand is buying anything pretty," another voice answered. "He doesn't care where they are from."

"Boys! Boys!" A woman's voice, sounding minty and mauve to /dev/grrl's drug-addled senses. "I'm afraid this one is spoken for."

"What?"

"I have plans. Plans too big to be spoiled by a couple of jinteros."

/dev/grrl felt the floor. She'd been dropped. She sensed violence around her. Something warm splatter across her face. Focusing her mind, she willed her eyes open. And found herself looking into orange eyes, so close they blotted out the world. Then the darkness rose up and took her.

BRIEF HISTORY OF CUBA

POSTED BY: KANE

Let's skip all the boring bits and get to the good stuff. Sure, Cuba has a history of pirates and dictators, but it's in the past and would make me fall asleep talking about it. If you need those details, look at the Aetherpedia Timeline.

Between the plague, corrupt government, and economically crippling trade embargos, it was a miracle Cuba didn't go the way of Haiti. But Cubans are a resourceful lot. They couldn't stop the plague or the embargos, but they replaced the government with a new one under Lady Guadalupe and rebuilt their economy with an indigenous industry dedicated to recycling materials from their thousands of dumps. This gave them a buffer against the corporate vultures and enough breathing room to make their own choices. Today Cuba is a member of the Caribbean League, a free-spirited nation of pirates and thieves under a laissez-faire government that keeps just enough order to keep everything running.

THE NEW REPUBLIC OF CUBA

FACTS AT A GLANCE

Population: 8,500,000 as of January 1, 2077

- **Human:** 65%
- **Elf:** 10%
- **Dwarf:** 6%
- **Ork:** 13%
- **Troll:** 4%
- **Other:** 2%

Per Capita Income: 5,500¥
Population Below Poverty Level: 40%
Estimated SINless: 20%

Education: Education is free and compulsory for the first six years.

- **Less Than Twelve Years:** 6%
- **High School Equivalency:** 75%
- **College Degrees:** 15%
- **Advanced Degrees:** 4%
- **Literacy:** 95%

AETHERPEDIA: CARIBBEAN LEAGUE TIMELINE

2010: VITAS hits Cuba and almost four million (a third of the population) die. A high percentage of mortalities are children under the age of seventeen.

2011: UGE hits, but no one gets too crazy. All anyone wanted was ten fingers, ten toes; the other stuff is just window dressing.

2014: Severe drought and frequent hurricanes destabilize the government. Mafia takes over control of Cuba after Fidel Castro steps down. Lady Guadaloupe revitalizes the new revolution.

2022: On October 15, the Caribbean League is formed to prevent more islands from being gobbled up by corporations.

2022: In November, VITAS strikes again, killing another half million.

2032: In March, following the fracturing of the United States, Puerto Rico declares its independence from the U.S. and joins the league as Borinquen.

2034: South Florida joins the Caribbean League in December.

2046: The Dominican Republic's government collapses in April, leaving pirates to fight over the country.

2057: President Dunkelzahn is assassinated. Later that year his will is read, including a clause that reads "To the current head houngan of the Caribbean League, I leave one year's worth of talon clippings."

2058: On October 15, in an effort to limit fighting between houngan throughout the Caribbean League, Nadja Daviar of the Draco Foundation declares that the contest for their undeclared leader to receive the talon clippings left to them in Dunkelzahn's will must be completed by December 31, 2060.

2060: The fighting becomes mostly a political race, eventually leading to two final candidates by 2063.

2063: August, after much deliberation, Draco Foundation President Nadja Daviar declared Justin Rochefort the leader of the Voice and the recipient of the talon clippings. Rochefort does not live long enough to claim his prize, as his plane falls from the sky somewhere over the CAS, leaving no survivors. Marcus Cross is declared the successor to Rochefort, but is later arrested and imprisoned in Houston on charges of necromancy.

2064: The Voice of Ogoun is split in two. The first is the Voice of Ogoun, which follows the imprisoned Marcus Cross. The second is Voice of Agwe following Claude-Michael Flaubert, who lost to Rochefort in the effort to unify the houngan.

2071: Marcus Cross is freed from prison and moves to Trinidad to confront Flaubert. In a dramatic duel of magic, Flaubert is defeated. Ogoun speaks through Cross to reunite the organization, ending the bloodshed.

2072: Marcus Cross is recognized as the leader of the Voice of Ougan. The Draco Foundation sends the talons to Papa Cross in Trinidad. The aircraft delivering the talons is lost at sea from a sudden storm. Some blame the Zobop, Aztlan, or Flaubert. The search of the plane found parts of the aircraft, but the six strongboxes containing the talon clippings were lost.

2073: A new national Cuban holiday honoring Guadalupe Martinez is instituted

2074: On August 18, Hurricane Donald and the Dragon Sirrug simultaneously land in Borinquen and devastate the island with emphasis on NatVat. The entire facility is wiped out.

- The "buzo" waste pickers used to be untouchable pariahs. That all changed when people saw they could earn ten times their government "salary" sorting and hauling the materials to the processors.
- Darwin

The Cuban government rebranded themselves as Neo-Communist. Not sure what that means, but they got that "Neo" in front of it so it sounds cool. The government controls maybe sixty percent of the businesses in Cuba and manages what is produced and allocated—even by the companies they don't run directly. Unless you're smuggling your own raw materials, you're rationed. The government manufacturers must meet but not exceed a strictly regulated quota—quotas for the non-government manufacturers aren't technically mandatory, but you won't find anyone rocking the boat. They keep the economy up and running. One bright spot is Blue Star, a semi-privatized healthcare company that competes with John Hopkins (JHIH) and DocWagon. Blue Star provides free care to Cuban citizens and threat response services to other islands.

- Note the word "citizen." Attaining citizenship is a carrot offered to laborers from Chinatown and other non-Cuban communities to work for government corps on the cheap.
- BTL Bailey

Officially, twenty percent are independent operations or "government-sponsored independent opera-

tions"—meaning they borrowed from the government to become independent. Most of these would register as mom-and-pop places, though a few family businesses reached A status. Unofficially—when you factor in the pirates, smugglers, criminals, and other grey- or black-market providers of needs that the government doesn't acknowledge—we're talking something like thirty percent independent. The cost of this business is put on the tourist buying those goods. Hell, the government offers permits for some of this stuff, which adds revenue to the government. Makes me wish I bought myself an island when I had the chance. Maybe I'll be able to afford Dominica when I retire. But I digress.

The last twenty, twenty-five percent (and yes, I know these shares of the pie add up to more than a hundred percent; given the deceptions, misdirections, and players wearing several hats, this is as accurate as things get) is the Big Ten or their subsidiaries that have gained footholds. This doesn't mean there's a McHugh's or a Cap'n Beef on every corner, and I'm sure as hell there's no Stuffer Shacks (meaning Aztechnology). What you have are shiny Knight Errant officers in Old Havana, Zoe and Evo with Caribbean brands of clothing, and airport terminals filled with corporate flights and corporate stores selling corporate things. There are probably a few others that I missed, though there's always a political angle that is being worked when an AAA corp gets a contract in Cuba. The Caribbean League has no love for the corporations—defending against them is its whole *raison d'être* after all. But the Cuban government understands the importance of doing business, just not with Atzechnology. And through the Corporate Court, many of the assets seized by the communist government were returned to descendants of families that were exiled.

- Lady Guadalupe was a genius. Cuba had to diversify or it would look just as bad as Aztechnology and might not financially survive. Instead of trading with the big boys, she built her base trading parts of Cuba back to Cubans.
- Pyramid Watcher

- Too bad her son didn't inherit her smarts. Ah, well, that's history now.
- Darwin

Like many of the islands in the Caribbean League, Cuba was brutally exploited by the corps. Strip mining, wholesale deforestation, over-farming and over-fishing—even metahuman trafficking. The government instituted aggressive restoration and reclamation programs to bring back the island's natural beauty, resources, historical sites, and cultural heritage in order to bring back the lucrative tourist trade that powers its economy.

The Cuban government has made some moves toward financial equity—no one starves, but if you want more than subsistence living, you're going to have to earn it. There's a huge gap between the wealthy and the highest tier of the middle class—hence all those independent operations. With tourism being the number-one business, you can't throw a stone in Havana without hitting a Cuban grabbing for their piece of the action. You'll find tour guides, chauffeurs, and street vendors wherever tourists land in Cuba. Tips and bribes are synonymous and expected. So if you travel here, remember to add ten percent to any and all transactions—including the "free" services. And if you're going to do a lot of traveling, hire a guide. That way you don't have to do all the negations.

- Oh, and don't cheap out on tips. I knew a foreigner who did that a few times on his Cuban trip, and once word got around, no one would help him. Ended up stuck in corporate-owned dumps.
- Traveler Jones

At first Cuba adopted the peso as part of its cultural heritage, but the realities of tourism and international commerce drove an almost instant switch to the electronic nuyen. The Crash Virus didn't have a direct impact on Cuba because much of their technology then was still twenty years out of date; but indirectly Cuba took a financial hit in the form of lost trade and tourism. After the Crash and institution of safety measures, Cuba took the risk of upgrading its technological infrastructure—trading a bit of quaintness for economic efficiency. It's easier to deal with the rest of the world when you speak the same language. The government also made sure that every citizen got a commlink with instructions on how it could be used to receive tips. It was a joke trying to get people to stop using hard currency, let alone use a commlink for transactions. Old-timers continued to hoard pesos after the banks stopped taking them. There are still local markets where you can only do business in barter pesos—coins, not paper scrip, of course; the metal has value. There's no government currency exchange—you'll have to sell something in the barrens to receive pesos.

The government didn't have much of a Matrix infrastructure even in the early years of Neo-Communism, which meant a steep learning curve for those not working for a corporation. In 2034 the government established an island-wide network of "Navigation Halls," where regular citizens could access the Matrix via terminals. It wasn't until the formation of the Caribbean League that government hosts were constructed within the Matrix. Fast-forward to today, and Cuba's local grid is a vibrant commercial environment hoping to entice travelers to physically come to Cuba. The public grid is actually top quality, with government funding going toward live feeds of baseball games for all Cuban citizens and virtual travelers. The old Navigation Halls became equivalent to decker bars, and the rest is history.

NATIONAL GRID

CARIBNET (CARIBBEAN LEAGUE)

Access Icon: Spanish Galleon

Like the Alohanet, CaribNet connects the various island members of the league across expanses of water. The grid reflects exotic locations and high-seas adventures, as agents captain virtual ships on the ocean, promoting their designated island or local corporation. The occasional battle between agents adds colorful entertainment. Corporate advertisement isn't completely blocked, but what seeps in is low-grade flotsam on a shiny sea.

- Note that PubGrid and CaribNet both go a little crazy around the Bermuda Triangle area. Disorientation and corrupt code are common. The locals joke that the CaribNet becomes the CharybdisNet there, spawning virtual sea monsters that devour commlinks. I think it's urban legend drek, but then, I've never been there.
- Bull

LOCAL GRID

HAVANA PEARL (CUBA)

Access Icon: A 20th century classic corvette with one door open, hoping someone will hop in.

The virtual reality of the Cuban grid is a vibrant show of entertainment venues and tropical beaches. The buildings and places are restorations of what they were in their heyday showing what the virtual viewer is missing. Your persona doesn't walk or run through this grid—instead, it sways and dances to the beat of the constant background music.

- Hacking in Cuba was a joke in the 2060s. It took several incidents—including Najima Securities waltzing through the Caribbean Navy's protocols—before the government got its Matrix security act together.
- Bull

I mentioned Knight Errant. Their jurisdiction is limited to Old Havana and Havana Bay. It made more economic and practical sense for the government to contract a corporate security provider familiar with international and corporate jurisdictions than to retrain and retool local law enforcement. The Neo-Communists gave the Policía Nacional Revolucionaria, or PNR, a bit of a marketing makeover. For the benefit of the tourists, there are clean-cut men and women in bright green dress uniforms with polished leather flap holsters and silver shock batons. They give directions and efficiently arrest miscreants on public news feeds. Less obvious are the nondescript men and women in dull brown uniforms or civilian dress cut to conceal weapons and body armor who blend into the background. These specialize in the "enforcement" part of law enforcement—coming down on criminals who haven't "paid their dues," or individuals who've managed to get on the president's shit list. These are the guys you'll deal with running in Cuba. If you're not terminally stupid, it will all come down to tips and bribes. "Fines" will include costs of any permits or licenses you forgot to apply for, along with penalties and estimated court fees, plus individual tips for the officers—depending on what you're up to. Figure a few hundred to a few thousand nuyen. Don't get cheeky with these guys. They can and will drop you in an oubliette and forget you. (Oubliette: cool word for a stone hole accessed only through a trapdoor meters above your head. Every fortress in Cuba has one, or several, thoroughly upgraded with tech and magic.)

- Could be worse. You could end up on some plantation as a zombie with no memories of how you got there.
- Coral Reefer

So what's good around here? I'm glad you asked. You have your rum, and when you need to be sober, you have your Cuban coffee. Tourists don't know coffee. You have to ask specifically for Café Cubano or you'll get soykaf that's been shoved through an espresso machine, and you'll pay twelve nuyen for it. How you say it and smile will determine how much locally harvested coffee and sugar goes into your cup. Expect to pay at least forty nuyen for the good stuff. As for the rum, the government imports a variety of cheap, synthetic blends they rebrand with colorful local names for the bargain tourist trade and the poor. The national brand, locally produced by government distilleries, is some of the best on the market. Of course, local shopkeepers dilute it with cheap crap—more bottles to sell the tourists at eighty to one hundred nuyen a bottle. The stuff they sell at the airport is the worst, like rubbing alcohol with fifteen percent rum, bad enough to make you wish you'd gone blind after drinking it. There's a good business in selling empty rum bottles to both the distillers and diluters—which is why it's very bad form to break a rum bottle, even over an attacker's head. Bacardi, also top grade, has less of a problem with middlemen diluting their product due to their ties to pirate distributers willing to bash the heads of anyone undercutting their product.

With Cuba's government-supported pay system, traditional cuisine for the majority of Cubans, middle class and below, is pretty basic soy products livened up with local, usually ersatz, spices. Not long ago, big corporations tried to get a toehold in Cuba through the food industry by buying up chains like Krill Kings or the old Las Tunas, which dated from the days of Fidel. This came to an abrupt end when the public—who takes freedom from corporate exploitation seriously—figured out what

AETHERPEDIA

CUBAN TERMINOLOGY

Bodegas: Government-operated grocery/supply stores. There is little or no variety to the items stocked, and they are sold in limited quantities.

Camellos: A.k.a. camel buses. Besides the well-used buses, there are camellos, passenger trailers able to hold up to two hundred people towed by tractor trucks. Built for efficiency, not comfort.

Cocotaxis: The ubiquitous three-wheeled taxis found in every city. Essentially a converted moped with a bench seat for passengers mounted between two rear wheels behind the driver.

Jinteros/Jinteras: Anyone who provides entertainment to the tourists. This includes jugglers, acrobats, and musicians, but is often applied to prostitutes.

Máquina: A.k.a. Yank Tank. Any pre–Sixth World manufactured car. There are an estimated 20,000 of these classic vehicles still driving in Cuba today.

Navigation Halls: Caribbean version of decker bars. These used to be government-sponsored computer labs to teach (and monitor) citizens in Matrix use prior to distributing commlinks. It is estimated that as many as thirty navigation halls abandoned by the government have been restored by private citizens.

Paladares: Privately owned restaurants. Compared to the government-controlled restaurants, paladares have faster service, but often run out of food before the end of the day.

Tukola: Cuban government version of a Q-Cola, with a Magüi instead of a feathered serpent. The Tukola brand has a unique "Pineapple express" flavor found only in the Caribbean.

CUBAN SPORTS TEAMS

Urban brawl: Havana Guerillas

Combat biker: Varadero Vaqueros

Baseball: See Caribbean Super Series <Link>

EXAMPLE CUBAN PRICES

Cocotaxi Ride: 5 to 20¥ per kilometer

Café Cubano: 40 to 100¥

Tukola: 2 to 5¥

- Note that all are given as a range. There's no fixed pricing. The lower price is about what a Cuban will pay, the upper end is what is offered to tourists. Everyone else pays somewhere in the middle.
- The Chromed Accountant

was happening. Anti-corp hate crimes escalated quickly to violence until President Enrique Martinez kicked all offshore corps out. For a while, all restaurants were government-owned. Private entrepreneurs, usually government-sponsored, started taking them over, but the majority that serve the general public are still run by the government. They provide a simple menu with dishes that are affordable for the locals and/or tailored to what the tourist expects. This would be soy tostadas and soy-based empanadas (chicken sandwiches) or pan con bistec (thin steak sandwich). Restaurants catering to the upper-middle class or budget tourist trade also feature real shrimp, lobster, or fish dishes.

- Tourists expect fast food, so many chefs use expensive soy processors. The texture and taste are good enough to fool tourists, but it's made in half the time it takes to cook the real stuff.
- Darwin

Fishing is big business. The government maintains fish farms, shrimp hatcheries, and krill tanks. In addition to supplementing the local diet, fish are good for tourism. From fishing-boat charters, to swimming with rare sea creatures, to fresh seafood at premium restaurants, seafood generates income. The government has taken steps to maintain sustainable fishing stock, including establishing artificial seaweed beds around the island. This has brought the government into conflict with the Zobop over the farming of deepweed. Deepweed produces nicotine, which defends the seaweed from predators. However, this develops nicotine addiction among urchins and other creatures that, in combination with its magical properties, makes them easy targets to carnivorous predators. Despite this ecological impact, the deepweed is essential to maintaining the seaweed forests. Gunboat skirmishes occur on a weekly basis between the navy and poachers/pirates trying to farm deepweed in protected areas.

Privately owned restaurants—called *paladares*—face a confusing array of regulations because they present something of a problem. The government would like them to succeed—if only get them off the public dole—but the large resorts and commercial interests that fund the government do not want competition. The regulations can limit the number of diners at a table, or forbid shrimp entrées on weekends, or mandate awkward hours of operation. Cuba being Cuba, special waivers and per-

mits can be obtained by paying local law enforcement the right fees. No one can afford all the fees, so the restaurant owners pick and choose, hoping to find a combination works for them—accepting restricted hours but securing the right to serve non-soy *Polo al Ajillo*, for example, or giving up beef for the right to host receptions. Some restaurateurs get creative, enhancing their menus with items not specifically regulated, such as certain types of fish and local fruit, or featuring specialty drinks. If nothing else the regulations ensure that each paladare is unique.

Cubans get most of their groceries from government bodegas. Back when things were bad and everyone was on short rations, there were armed guards and no options on what you bought—they gave you your calorie allotment in whatever they had on hand. Usually soy. It was pretty grim before the government imported processors able to emulate real food, and even then it was not good. The government, with the help of a few entrepreneurs, probably avoided food riots by giving priority to importing and distributing spices—real garlic, bay, laurel, cumin, and even lime juice. The soy was still soy, but when the cooks at home were done with it, it was *Cuban* soy. These days the guards are gone, and the bodegas look more like corporate grocery stores. Everything is government brand, of course, but there's variety and no rationing. A more recent development is the *tiendas*. Or, I should say, legally licensed tiendas, as people were bartering, trading, and selling back when capitalism was punishable by death. Tiendas are independent, family-owned markets. They're allowed to sell certain government-brand basics, but they mostly deal in local items—produce, crafts, what have you—and they will still trade you a few eggs for avocados from your greenhouse. They're not as regulated as the restaurants, as they're no threat to the resorts.

I snagged Fumando's write-ups of the Martinez family, the Batista family, the Zobop, the Vory, the Triad, and all the other colorful players infesting Cuba's underbelly. It's attached somewhere down the line, so I won't go into detail here. If you listened to President Martinez, you'd think Cuba is first and foremost in the war on pirates, smugglers, drug dealers, and metahuman traffickers in the Caribbean League. He's got the trids of pirate ships being sunk and slavers executed to prove it. But the cold fact is, he doesn't care about Haiti, St. Croix, the Bahamas, or any of the rest. And as long as they pay their fees he's not too curious about the smugglers or pirates, either. Everything he does is to keep Cuba—and President Martinez—in the spotlight, able to sway public opinion and influence League policies and decisions. If you have the money and the cojones, you can do what you want in Cuba. Except—and this is vital—anything that will hurt the tourist industry. For all its progress and recovery, Cuba still has a long climb ahead of it. Agriculture, industry, infrastructure are all just getting back on their feet. And right now the economic engine that makes all of the progress and restoration possible is tourism. Screw with that, and you've screwed yourself.

HAVANA

POSTED BY: FUMANDO
PIRATED BY: KANE

Havana is truly the Pearl of the Caribbean, with beaches more inviting than the Riviera, architecture more inspiring than Madrid, and culture steeped in the best traditions of a hundred peoples. Of course, where there is light there is also darkness, and the darkness of Havana is the corruption and power struggles that hinder the city attaining its full glory. But the political shadow is not sufficient to prevent people from all over the world from seeking out the city's beauty and the opportunities it offers.

Havana's architecture reflects the diverse cultural roots of its people. Stand anywhere and you will see buildings of Spanish colonial, post-modern, Moorish, Neo-Classical, and Art-Deco designs—along with buildings that blend those and others—giving the city an ambiance that cannot be matched anywhere. New construction is not required to follow any particular school of design, but new buildings must harmonize with the older ones around them. And the older buildings are being restored to their original state with meticulous attention to detail. The only exceptions are the office buildings and warehouses constructed in the Soviet style when Russia most heavily influenced Cuban life. Those buildings are being repurposed as hotels and casinos. To better serve the tourist industry, the dreary industrial blocks are being transformed with Romanesque columns, Spanish arches, elegant balconies, and beautiful local tiles artfully inlaid walls and ceilings, so that they can be ignored by the oblivious tourist masses.

- What does he have against tourists?
- Coral Reefer

- He's pissed tourists don't come here to stand in awe of Cuban art and culture. They get off the boat for the sole purpose of enjoying themselves with childish things, like cigars they believe were rolled on the thighs of beautiful Cuban women, before getting back on the boat to their dreary wageslave lives. I'm just glad that some of their money stays here, whether they wanted it to or not.
- Kane

Music in Cuba has evolved, but the island still has a sound that is all its own. Trova, with its poetic lyrics and intricately fanciful guitar playing, is considered the first uniquely Cuban music, but son cubano, blending the driving, syncopated rhythms of Africa with Latin melodies, emerged soon after. These two forms, progenitors of salsa and bolero, become part of any music brought to Cuba—from Catholic hymns to troll drinking songs to nursery rhymes to goth rock. Son and trova have each

developed numerous subgenres, including seis son and novisma mondo trova, but neither has lost its identity.

The global appeal and influence of Cuban music is a major reason tourists come to Cuba. And tourists are the lifeblood of the island. Massive corporate cruise ships deposit thousands every day—some in Havana Bay, more in corporate beaches and resorts in East Havana. These tourists pay premium prices for severely limited quantities of Cuban rum and cigars or for authentic Cuban cuisine and nightlife. They spend even more, some losing fortunes, gambling at Sports Town or in the government casinos surrounding Revolution Square.

The popular perception is that Cuba's economy depends on piracy and the black market. It is an open secret that all (or almost all) of the island's laws are very flexible if the right fees are paid. For some reason, tourists find this brush with crime exciting—provided the crime doesn't affect them directly, of course. But while some might imagine Cuba is only a few steps from sinking into the lawless chaos of Haiti, things are not as uncontrolled as they're rumored to be. While the only obvious arm of law enforcement in Cuba is the National Police in their emerald-green uniforms (augmented by the black and gold of Knight Errant in Havana and environs), there are less obvious government agencies at work. For the most part, criminals know that if they pay the right fees, they can operate to a certain degree outside the law. But they also know there are serious consequences for exceeding certain limits.

Organized crime also plays a role in law enforcement—or at least keeping order—particularly since President Ray Martinez came into power. There is a constant ebb and flow of power plays and turf wars going on beneath the surface of Cuban society, but all parties involved understand the concept of a goose with golden eggs and keep anything that might disrupt the flow of tourist money and keep their struggles covert. While certain crimes against tourists are tolerated—selling counterfeit cigars, adjustments to the roulette wheel or the baccarat deck, etc.—anyone who gets too greedy or too violent runs the risk of being brought down by their colleagues before the police get to them.

President Ray Martinez's approach to law enforcement has been effective. Statistics for all types of crime, particularly those that affect tourists directly, are all dramatically lower than they were when Enrique was president.

- Of course reports of theft are down. What kind of idiot is going to file a complaint about getting ripped off trying to score black-market cigars?
- Darwin

- A pirate robbing a pleasure yacht might not see jail time. On a good day he might be found adrift; on a bad day, shark bait.
- Swash and Buckle

- There's no kiddie play area in Havana. If you want a toned-down version, stay on the corporate cruise ship. Drugs, gambling, and prostitution are all legal when you come ashore. So's anything else you can dream up, provided you pay your dues and your respects to the authorities.
- Kane

- The government lets everyone who plays by their rules make a profit. The Mafia, Triad, Vory, Zobop, you name it. Sometimes they play nice, other times they bloody one another's nose.
- Darwin

HOW TO GET AROUND

American cars more than a century old are a symbol of wealth and status here in Havana. The 1950s classic models are from the days before a trade embargo banned future car sales through most of Cuba's modern history. Keeping the cars running with anything they can find shows Cuban ingenuity. Today, current cars are retrofitted with turn-of-the-century replica covers in homage to that status symbolism.

- Because vehicles are shipped/smuggled to Havana, the price of a new car is out of reach of most residents. Even the middle class cobbles cars together from purchased and reclaimed parts instead of buying whole cars.
- The Chromed Accountant

- You can blame the pirates for causing this problem.
- Kane

- You could also blame the government for low salaries and restrictions on vehicle imports. You know it's to keep up appearances. If everyone had a car, Cuba would cease to be picturesque.
- Darwin

The government provides basic public transportation with converted Leyland-Rovers or Renault-Fiat Camellos. These buses run specific routes in each town. Independent Cubans with their own busses are more nomadic. Catering to the tourist trade, they pick up fares where they can find them and take them where they want to go—usually offering services as a tour guide along the way. If your destination isn't on the established bus route, or you don't want to wait for the bus, there are always at least a dozen of the ubiquitous cocotaxies in hailing distance—including some that are probably trying to entice you into a ride the moment you hit the streets. Cocotaxies combine the front half of a scooter, which the driver sits astride, and a bench seat mounted between two rear wheels. Traditionally they're semi-enclosed by an egg-shaped body that offers little protection against the elements.

ALONZO

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 1
Type: Support
Preferred payment method: Barter (Foodstuff)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Drinking)
Personal Life: Divorced
Description: Alonzo, also known as Jolly Roger, is a local character. He pilots his sightseeing boat dressed as a pirate—complete with eye patch, plumed captain's hat, and red-throated parrot on his shoulder. Though superficially decorated as a pirate ship—complete with skull-and-crossbones flag—his deep-vee runabout is a capable vessel boasting a pair of powerful outboard motors. Though he operates primarily as a tour guide, Alonzo is a licensed ship's captain and performs several weddings on the "high seas" every year. Walking the plank after the ceremony is optional.

It is almost impossible to buy or even borrow a car without weeks of negotiation and preparation, but scooters are always available for rent or sale. Scooters are cheap and reliable, and even the average working-class family owns, on average, 1.5 scooters—2.5 for a middle class family. But even if you secure a car or a scooter, getting around Havana without a local guide can be confusing. It's not unusual for a street to have as many as three official names and be known to the locals by a fourth. Street signs are not common. Until you know your way around, hiring a local guide is always prudent. Beyond the metropolitan area, the government maintains a rail system that connects all the major cities. The trains for Cubans and the trains for tourists are strictly segregated, and there are separate stations for each class in every city.

- There was a glut of E.S. Papooses brought to Cuba a decade ago that really boosted people's self-worth and independence. Apparently a pirate gang made off with three cargo containers from Tampa thinking they have some trideo sets or other entertainment devices. They didn't realize Entertainment Systems was a corporate name.
- Clockwork

- Remember this is Cuba. When Fumando says 1.5 scooters, he really means that people will have 1 scooter and half a scooter that they are still buying parts for or are cannibalizing to keep the first one running. Half-scooters: They're not just for averages anymore!
- Kane

By sea, there are many charter boats and captains ready for hire, ranging from the man with a brightly painted skiff and parrot on his shoulder to the fifteen-meter cruisers for deep-sea fishing or diving around the island. Be careful of who you go to sea with, or you could get mixed up with smugglers or real pirates. Something that would be hard to explain to Knight Errant or the Caribbean League Navy.

- The fake pirate in the skiff is my second cousin, Alonzo. Not the sharpest hook in the tackle box, but he supposedly has some magical talent related to the sea. Nice guy. He can be hired for a few nuyen an hour, provided you pack a lunch for him.
- Swash and Buckle

- The navy isn't as interested in taking down pirates as they once were. Most patrols follow predictable routes that can be learned for a price. A pirate who gets caught has the option of paying the CLN ship a fee—ostensibly equivalent to court costs and fines—and going on their way. Of course, a pirate who gets caught and protests may be charged with resisting arrest—with their attempted escape and subsequent sinking of their ship documented on the trids
- Kane

Tracking vehicles and monitoring traffic is all done by Mitsuhama. GridGuide was the first corporation allowed into Cuba back in 2034. GridGuide and GridGuide: Harbor Master helped Cuba register and track all vehicles on land and sea within the Cuban Local Grid. Most of the locals don't need autopilot or GridGuide support since they take public transportation or have much older vehicles that would lose value if retrofitted with autopilot controls. The real benefit is to the government, which can collect licensing fees and track various vehicles in and around Cuba. Traffic penalties are supposedly automated, but of course the Cuban law enforcement will take the fee on behalf of the government so you don't have to go to court/jail.

- Personally I think the emphasis was on tracking Máquinas anywhere in Cuba. If the NeoComms believe that too many cars on the road will devalue the Máquinas, then they could deny licensing. It's already almost punishable by death to steal a Máquina or carjack someone.
- BTL Bailey

FAMILY BUSINESS

One thing Lady Guadalupe recognized early on was that diversification is necessary for Cuba to not only survive but flourish. That's why a key component to Neo-Communism is the allocation of resources to encourage individuals to develop their own businesses. That may sound counterintuitive, but she reasoned that an effective economic defense against large corporations trying to take over would be a collective of small-business owners, each with a personal stake in the outcome. Of course the emphasis is on small businesses and incorporating more of the community or forming collectives with similar businesses, rather than pure expansion—there are not-obvious impediments to any Cuban corporation rising above A status. This strategy has proven effective in keeping the predatory AAA corporations at bay.

The Cuban government also offered incentives to Cuban families who'd had businesses but been exiled by the early communists to return home and reestablish their companies.

BACARDI

The name Bacardi has been associated with authentic Cuban rum for over two hundred years and is credited with refining rum into its modern form. (The Arechabala family copied their distilling methods, marketing their own Havana Club Rum until the Bacardi family bought them out and established Havana Club as their own second-tier rum.) The Bacardi family had been sympathetic to Fidel Castro's revolutionary cause until he embraced the pro-Soviet doctrine of Che Guevara. In 1960, all Bacardi assets in Cuba were seized and the family forced into exile. The Bacardis had distilleries in Europe and the America and were able to continue marketing their rum, but the government nationalized Havana Club Rum. The Bacardi family returned from exile at the invitation of the government after Castro stepped down. They returned to the Art Deco Bacardi Building they'd been forced to abandon and began rebuilding the connections they'd once had in the community. With the legal help of the new Caribbean League and NEEC, Bacardi won their Havana Club brand name back (the previous government had licensed it to a French corporation). Bacardi's Havana Club is now their premium rum, made only in Cuba. Quantities are limited because the Cuban sugar cane fields are still recovering, and pure Havana Club is beyond the reach of all but the very rich.

James Cutillas, eleventh generation of the Bacardi family and head of the Havana Club distilleries in Cuba, is striving to make a name—and a power base—for himself in Cuban politics. He does not have the connections or the financial resources to take on the Martinez family directly, but because of his efforts the Bacardi family is seen as a rising star in the Caribbean League. It will be interesting to see how that plays out in future elections.

JAMES CUTILLAS

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 6
Type: Support
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Baseball)
Personal Life: In a relationship
Description: Cutillas presents the world with a larger-than-life, flamboyant persona as he promotes his family's brand and works to expand their market globally. It remains to be seen whether his ambition to elevate Bacardi above A status is practical. Lacking the political connections and acumen to compete with Martinez politically, Cutillas builds his base with the people through philanthropic programs—helping individuals and communities that can't afford the bribes necessary to get help—especially those working to establish their own businesses.

- One work-around for the short supply of sugar has been smuggling. Weapons for sugar and rum for cash—trades that always find willing partners. Bacardi don't get directly involved, but they definitely contract out.
- Swash and Buckle

- I'm just glad they made that final move from Borinquen to Cuba. If they'd stayed, I'd be mourning the loss of one of my best friends.
- Kane

- The Bacardis don't have criminal ties, but they have political ties outside of Cuba. They have family in the governments of both Borinquen and Florida. Rumor has it they have family in the DSI, which is why the NEEC was so keen to help them out.
- Thorn

- The iconic Bat has also been the spirit mentor for Awakened Bacardi family members for generations. I heard that there's a secret rite of passage for the family as they Awaken.
- Abracadavre

BELLOS

Cuban cigars are almost all produced by Partagas, a Cuban government- (which is to say Martinez-) controlled corporation. The Bellos family, however, had taken a supply of Cuban tobacco seeds with them when they

DONNA FRANCISCO

Metatype: Ork
Sex: Female
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 4
Type: Shadow Service
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Baseball)
Personal Life: Single
Description: Donna Francisco, Don Francisco's granddaughter, is the rigger pilot of an Ultra-Suez-class Feeder. This 1000 TEU ship is equipped with three cranes and thirty omni-directional aquatic drones. The aquatic drones stabilize the ship in all but severe weather conditions, allowing safe and efficient ship-to-shore and ship-to-ship cargo transfers. Donna's ship picks up and delivers cargo for all parts of the Caribbean League.

fled to Miami and produced a small (compared to Partagas) but steady supply of Cuban cigars throughout their exile. Now the Bellos family has returned to Havana, but there are restrictions on how large their manufacturing plant can be. They get around this by routing misplaced bales of tobacco to their plant in Miami. The finished cigars somehow find their way into Havana for sale. No records, of course, and the agents charged with keeping an eye on their imports and exports are living quite comfortably.

- They moved from Miami to Havana to establish ties to the Neo-Communist government. Bellos started looking into chemistry years ago and extracting the most from the tobacco they get. They still produce those premium Bellos cigars, but their real money is made through the manufacture of "essence of tobacco" that supposedly gives e-cigars that authentic Cuban flavor.
- Cosmo

FRANCISCO

Don Francisco was a Pirate King in the early 2020s. He controlled a few island rocks that were of little value on their own but put him in position to regulate a couple of major shipping lanes. He gathered more wealth than he would have pirating by charging a toll on his sea lanes. Ships that paid passed unmolested. Ships that didn't were marked for attack by other pirates who'd received detailed information about their cargo, defenses, and route from Francisco.

When the League formed, Don Francisco went legit. Francisco Transportation runs fifteen large cargo ships that travel to all parts of the League, protected by Don Francisco's legacy of a lifetime among pirates and his years as a Pirate King. Francisco Transportation's prices are a bit higher than those of other independent cargo carriers, but they can guarantee delivery with no loss to pirates.

- His legacy won't last long. Another year at most. Ares Heavy Airships are eating into the surface shipping market, and the rising generation of pirates don't give a damn about who he used to be.
- Kane

MARTINEZ

The Martinez family is the founding family of the Caribbean League. Without their leadership, the megacorps targeting weaker nations would have divided the Caribbean into a patchwork of wholly owned corporate satrapies. They have controlled Cuba since the inception of the League.

LADY GUADALUPE MARTINEZ (1988–2072)

As a successful businesswoman in Miami, Guadalupe Martinez had always loved Cuba, the home her parents had fled. She founded an organization to help Cubans coming to Miami find careers, not just work, and to be successful on their own. For decades her people kept a close eye on Cuba, aided by information from family members still in the country. She saw serious flaws in Castro's economic and political institutions and put together a series of programs—updated as conditions in Cuba changed—for bringing her ideas home. Martinez came to Castro when it was apparent he was preparing to step down and tried to convince him that the Neo-Communist model offered the best hope for Cuba. Castro rejected her ideas, choosing a familiar and trusted comrade as his successor. As history shows, his choice was a bad one. With the government collapsing in confusion and indecision, Lady Guadalupe seized the reins of power in a bloodless coup. Bringing the full force of her Miami organization to bear, she stabilized the nation and established the political and economic policies of Neo-Communism as the structure on which everything depended.

- No thanks to the Mafia. They pushed every button possible till the incident in Havana Bay.
- Darwin

In 2020, citing her success in stabilizing Cuba, she called on the other independent nations of the Caribbean to join Cuba in forming a confederation. Many dismissed the data and projections she presented trying to get them to stand together against the corporations as alarmist rhetoric intended to frighten them into submit-

ting to Cuba's rule. Her proposal was rejected. It took ORO grabbing NatVat in 2021 to convince them the danger was real enough to bring them all back to the negotiating table.

History records that from 2022 till 2046, Lady Guadalupe brought prosperity to Cuba. Actually, she universally applied and enforced the principles of Neo-Communism. This elevated the poor but also weakened anyone in a position to challenge the government. Most Cubanos considered this a fair trade. In 2045, citing failing health, she began turning the reins of government over to her younger son, Enrique, and in 2046 she stepped down. She and her husband Hector lived in relative isolation in Juraco until her death in 2072. The country and the nation mourned her passing. The anniversary of her arrival in Cuba is now a national holiday.

- There are no dark deeds in the official history of Lady Guadalupe's salvation of Cuba. Those events have been buried deep.
- Plan 9

ENRIQUE "PRETTY BOY" MARTINEZ (2023–2067)

Enrique "Pretty Boy" Martinez was elected president in 2047. Not that it was much of an election; he'd been seen at his mother's elbow for over a year, and no one doubted he was Lady Guadalupe's anointed successor.

- It's been stated many times: Only a Martinez could challenge a Martinez. The only reason there are opponents in the "elections" is to make everything appear properly democratic and above board.
- Darwin

Enrique grew up in privilege, with private tutors and trainers and surrounded by servants, and he had very little contact with the people and country outside his entitled environment. He saw Cuba obey his mother without question with no understanding of what she had done to earn that respect nor why she had done it. He simply assumed that was the natural order of things.

When he went to university at Princeton, he was fascinated by the larger world and the way corporations were able to exercise power at a global level. He wanted the ability to wield that same type of power. This ambition, in combination with his lack of cultural context, gave him an impression of how the Caribbean League should function that was very different from his mother's vision. It would not be unreasonable to say that he saw it as the Cuban League, with the Martinez family firmly in control.

During his first years as president he made several attempts to annex other League nations and make them a part of Cuba, under the pretext of making the League stronger and more cohesive. His first target was Borinquen. The Borinquen government was floundering, and its economy going through a series of abrupt "adjustments" when Enrique stepped in. He offered hundreds of skilled civil servants to help the administration govern effectively, the financial resources of Cuba to underwrite the Borinquen economy, and Cuba's ongoing support to ensure stability and prosperity. He was soundly rejected. His second and last target was Haiti—only eighty kilometers away and sinking into chaos. He had no trouble convincing other League members that Cuba needed to intervene. The Caribbean League Navy even supported his attempt to blockade the country. However, Cuba didn't have the military resources to follow through, and Enrique succeeded only in antagonizing already-hostile pirate kings and warlords.

Enrique's older brother Carlos had seen what their parents had gone through when they returned to Cuba. He understood the struggle and the plain hard work it had taken to make the humanitarian and economic reforms a reality. He was a firm believer in Neo-Communism and the nation's obligations to all its citizens—particularly those still living in foreign lands. It was perhaps this blind faith that had caused their mother to choose Enrique as her successor. Carlos seemed to honestly not mind which of them was president so long as their family's work continued and their mother's legacy assured. What he could not understand was why this seemed to mean so little to Enrique. There were frequent arguments.

Enrique, on the other hand, saw the culmination of his mother's work as Cuba becoming a major player on the global stage. In a reversal of Lady Guadalupe's policies, he invited overtures from the major corporations—accepting generous "personal incentives" and hosting lavish parties for corporate executives showcasing what Cuba had to offer.

- "Pretty Boy" courted all the corporate suitors. It was a dangerous game, trying to play them against each other. He was good at it, but not as good as he thought.
- Cosmo

Enrique amassed a personal fortune. He—or his sea captains—proved particularly adept at recovering entire cargos that had been stolen by pirates. The fate of the pirates was seldom known, but Enrique would sell the cargo to whoever paid the most money for it. He always gave the original owners first bid, but they didn't always make the highest offer.

By 2052 Carlos had had enough of his brother's behavior. Or perhaps he gave up on the hope that Enrique would ever embrace the dream and the mission of the Martinez family that their mother had embodied. For whatever reason, it became generally known that Carlos intended to challenge his brother for the presidency in 2053. Unfortunately, he did not live to make good on that promise. In the final week of 2052, Carlos and all

hands aboard his eighteen-meter motorsailer were lost at sea. It was speculated that a waterspout or microburst had sunk the boat before they could call for help. No debris or bodies were ever found.

- Conspiracy theorists had a field day with that. My favorite involved dragons. The two most popular explanations were that Carlos had either been killed by the corporations as a warning to Enrique to quit screwing around and toe the line, or he had been killed by Enrique to eliminate him as a problem and/or prove the corps that he had the balls to do whatever it took to get what he wanted.
- Sunshine

- Yeah, it's the latter. Come on, a guy with a highly skilled naval fleet that is very loyal to him sees his main rival sunk at sea? A three-year-old could connect those dots.
- Plan 9

Enrique ruled pretty much the way he wanted to, without check or balance, for another fifteen years. But as the 2067 election season began, he found himself facing his first serious challenger: his nephew Ray Martinez, only son of his brother Carlos. At first Enrique was unconcerned. Ray was still in his twenties and hadn't spent much of his time in the public eye. But early polls showed the two evenly matched among the few people willing to say they would vote. (Most, afraid of offending one Martinez or the other, refused to answer.) Enrique tried to sew up the election with gifts to the influential and celebrations for the masses, but none of his standard tactics gave him a significant lead.

We'll never know how the race would have played out, because two weeks into the six-week election season Enrique fell from Malecon Boulevard into the water and drowned. He was attending a gala party for his corporate supporters and had become inebriated. Witnesses say he was sitting on the railing, joking with people when he simply tipped backwards and disappeared. Whether he lost his balance or forgot where he was and leaned back is not clear, but no one was touching him or close enough to grab for him when he went over. A massive floral display marked the spot where he fell for weeks afterwards.

No other candidates arose to challenge Ray Martinez for the presidency.

- This was the corps telling Enrique—quite forcefully—that his attempt to play hardball with them by killing Carlos and not giving them a choice was not appreciated.
- Sunshine

- We all know what it is that touches you when it seems that nothing is. The crime was carried out astrally, likely by those who cared about Cuba's future and what Enrique was doing to its present.
- Man-of-Many-Names

CARLOS MARTINEZ (2012-2052)

Carlos remembered life before the reforms. He saw his mild-mannered father give his mother unstinting emotional support and worked side-by-side with volunteers distributing fliers and standing with them in the picket lines. He was never interested in politics, but Carlos loved Cuba. And for him Cuba was the people—including the Cubans unable to return to the island. Attending the University of Havana, he became interested in the Awakened, seeing them as evidence of Cuba's deeper roots. For years he sailed among the islands of the Caribbean League and up to Miami. His genuine interest in and commitment to the people made him an effective, if informal, goodwill ambassador for his mother and her policies.

When his son was born, he wanted to show him the world. He took Ray to see pirates and Taino villages, to attend Santeria ceremonies and Catholic Masses, to see high-tech hospitals and simple healers' huts. He wanted his son to be familiar with farms and factories and artisans' workshops as well as the halls of academia and power.

When Carlos saw Enrique taking Cuba in a different, dangerous direction, he realized he had no choice but to take the presidency away from his brother and put the nation back on its rightful path. In 2052 he reached out to the people he'd formed bonds with during his years of sailing from island to island and garnered the support he needed to challenge his brother in the 2053 elections. In 2052, while on his way to Miami for a year-end celebration, Carlos and his motor sloop disappeared. The Caribbean League Navy searched for days, but no wreckage was found.

- That pesky Bermuda Triangle.
- Mika

- My eye.
- Plan 9

RAY MARTINEZ (2044–PRESENT)

As a child, Ray Martinez was well known to the people of Cuba. The toddler trudging dutifully beside his father as Carlos visited offices or clinics, the lad closely studying any new thing he saw, and the boy exploring on his own as his father discussed production or safety with other adults. All that ended when Ray's father died. The Cuban public saw nothing of Ray between the solemn eight-year-old at his father's funeral to the intense young man challenging his uncle for the presidency.

Ray Martinez had not lived those years in seclusion; he'd simply done nothing to call attention to himself. Martinez is a common enough name that no one ever considered the earnest, perhaps even driven, young man so focused on learning everything he could about

economics and cultures might be *the* Ray Martinez. He made sure the corporations and governments he reached out to knew who he was, though, and they were all interested in making his acquaintance. By the time he was twenty-three, he had connections across the Caribbean League and beyond. That was in 2067, the year he challenged his uncle for the presidency.

How that contest between two Martinez's would have played out and what it would have done to Cuba will forever be a matter of conjecture. Before the political battle was fully joined, Enrique fell from a railing and drowned. Of course there were rumors of foul play—given the name and the stakes how could there not be? However, witnesses and security tapes were unanimous in their testimony that no one touched Enrique, but there will always be debates as to whether Enrique was unlucky or Ray had been quicker at the draw.

- Rumor has it Hanque Dofflemeyer of SK, a "close friend" and suspected bed partner of Enrique's, was there when he fell. Apparently she had an "extreme reaction" to some seafood at about the same time and was airlifted to a special clinic in the CAS immediately.
- Pyramid Watcher

Legend has it that when Ray saw Cuba's real situation—everything the president sees—for the first time he was struck by an inspiration. His uncle had created the Caribbean League Navy and had been trying at great expense to make it powerful enough to destroy the pirates plaguing the Gulf and the League. But after that, what? Atzlan and Aztechnology were just over the horizon—along with other corporations eager to carve the Caribbean League into profitable little chunks. The pirates weren't part of the League, but their attacks on the corporations' assets had helped make the League possible. Maybe he could continue that relationship. So he put together a special task force made up of the fast modern warships his uncle had bought for the navy and took on the pirates one at a time. The show of force ensured no one came to his prey's defense, and that the pirate in his crosshairs would accept his invitation to parlay before a shot was fired. He offered every captain the same deal: A pirate license—not privateer commission—to operate in a proscribed area unmolested. All the pirate had to do was follow certain guidelines regarding types of ships and cargos and pay a fee for each ship taken. For the first dozen or so, the penalty for not taking the deal was getting blown out of the water. After several pirates had signed on, the consequence became a reward to anyone who brought them down, no questions asked. In less than six months, he had pirates and even pirate kings coming to him, trying to negotiate licenses for the most profitable sea routes before their competitors did.

That's the legend. Common sense is a plan that complex and effective had been worked out months before he challenged Enrique. The fact he had the mechanism in place to quickly extended this "license and fees" program to a variety of organized criminal activities throughout Cuba supports that theory. This net effect was a significant increase in Cuba's revenues and an overall reduction in crime—particularly the violent, messy kind that frightened away tourists—as the gangs and crime families became self-policing.

- Don Miguel is a smart man. Ray Martinez is also a smart man. They try to keep out of each other's way, but there's only so much room on the island.
- Kane

RAY MARTINEZ

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 10
Type: Personal Favor
Preferred payment method: Nuyen
Hobbies/Vice: Nothing of Interest
Personal Life: None of your damn business
Description: Ray is a quiet, determined man. As a child he sailed the League with his father learning about all its peoples—an intense, hand's-on education he resumed incognito in his teen years. After his father's death he became more involved with his mother's occult practices, witnessing the raising of corps cadavres and other rituals. Despite his love for Cuba and its people—or perhaps because of it—Carlos saw no grey areas when it came to what was best for the nation. He meted out swift, brutal justice untempered by mercy. Ray, no stranger to the back of his father's hand, inherited his father's uncompromising discipline, and everyone understands the consequences of failing to meet his expectations. Because of his mother's talents there are always rumors that he curses his enemies, including his uncle, and that he meditates in a chamber of skulls. There is no evidence these or any other similar suppositions are true. The web of connections he began in his youth grows more extensive and powerful every day. He has ears and eyes in the administrations of several nations and corporations—making him a very valuable ally or a very dangerous adversary.

MCILHENNY

Not a name most people recognize, but McIlhenny products make soy foods tolerable, sometimes even flavorful. Through two centuries, the McIlhenny family made Tabasco sauce of various intensities on Avery Island. Avery Island is a large salt dome surrounded by bayous in southern Louisiana. The family was dedicated to preserving the natural beauty and biodiversity that surrounded them, so when in later years the widespread use of soy made spices and sauces more profitable than ever before, the McIlhennys built their new facilities farther inland. With more arable land available, they planted test crops of various peppers and spic-

es. A hurricane in 2036 caused extensive damage to their inland facilities, and as climate changes affected the bayous, their Avery Island plant became untenable. They transplanted examples of their essential crops to mobile hydroponic units, and—with adequate seed stock and secret recipes in hand— began looking for a new home. One with a good environment for their plants and a stable political and economic environment for their business. In 2040 Gary Monroe, eighth-generation McIlhenny, discovered everything they were looking for in Lady Guadalupe's Cuba. The discovery that immigrants and travelers had brought varieties of peppers, cumin, and other spices from four continents to the island clinched the deal. Today Avery Tower is a ten-story hydroponic farm producing high-quality peppers and spices with an adjacent plant to turn those crops into the delicious sauces and condiments that make soy a meal. Avery Tower employs several hundred agricultural and industrial workers year round.

- The self-contained McIlhenny operation was completely missed by the genetic plague that destroyed so many food crops. Some people believe the plague was natural, but it was just another weapon in the ongoing corporate wars.
- Pyramid Watcher

NEIGHBORHOODS

OLD HAVANA

Old Havana, the original heart of the city, was founded in 1519. The wandering streets and countless alleys evolved over time into a maze only the locals fully understand. Those streets and cobbled plazas are always full of life. The architecture evolved with the streets, as materials improved and fashions changed, though Neoclassicism predominates. Though storms and conflicts have damaged over a third of the buildings, there have been restoration projects over the years. Most recently in the late 2020s, when ruined or poorly repaired buildings were replaced with neoclassical enclaves for the representatives from the member nations of the Caribbean League. Because the district is so picturesque, it is a favorite with tourists, who litter the streets with AR tags and plastics and other casual waste like bright confetti. The emerald-green uniforms of Cuban peace officers complement the white dresses of the Santeria and the blues and reds of the street performers.

In the 2040s a section of Old Havana centered around the Plaza Vieja was set aside to become the capital of the Caribbean League. A wall was built, stretching south from the fortress of San Salvador de la Punta to the train station, to separate the new capital from the rest of Old Havana. Nicknamed the City of Columns for its neoclassical architecture, the capital district includes the Presidential Residence, the National Archive, the National Library, office buildings for each of the member nations and each ministry (education, health, etc.), the headquarters of some of the larger League corporations, luxurious short-term accommodations for visiting dignitaries, office buildings with space for various interest groups and legal firms, and exclusive, high-end condominiums. Ten monitored gates in the wall of columns ensure security within the district, and a special annex was added to the ferry terminal to allow tourists access to the museums, galleries, and monuments. The Caribbean League contracted Knight Errant to provide security for and within the City of Columns. Their exact status and jurisdictional authority relative to the Cuban National Police has been left deliberately vague to allow for adjustments to be made without red tape as developing situations warrant. Cuban law enforcement officers do patrol the major tourist areas and Knight Errant is authorized to accept individual security contracts that require their agents to travel anywhere in Cuba.

- This is what you would consider a standard business district. Corporate citizens, if they can afford it, live in dense condos built above corporate-sponsored marketing areas. It's not an arcology, but they work the space efficiently. These corporate blocks are fifteen stories tall, with the same neoclassical or colonial theme. So as not to spoil the architecture, AR logos and marketing signs are smaller than you'd see in the Americas.
- Cosmo

- The restoration was massive, with various contributions from the member states. To cut costs and line several pockets, most of the menial work went to Chinatown laborers and zombie slaves.
- Darwin

CALLE MERCADERES (MERCHANT'S STREET)

The cobbled streets and restored seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architecture make visitors to the Calle Mercaderes feel as though they have stepped back in time. No obviously modern devices or any vehicles that might spoil this effect are allowed in the area. Virtual Agents on the local grid appear dressed as "romanticized" Cubans from centuries past on every corner to help tourists with directions.

- "Romanticized" means mostly pirates to the tourists, and the government caters to that. Anything actually left from that period has been removed and put in museums. The actual museum that was there was relocated to the university district and the building converted into a mall of "authentic" shops. Anyone interested in the real history of Cuba can access the grid for a virtual tour.
- Traveler Jones

- There was an extensive collection of pre-Columbian Aztec pottery at the museum of Central American Art. Guess what historical displays got transferred to the president's shooting range?
- Pyramid Watcher

Most of the shops along Merchants' Street are high-end boutiques targeting wealthy tourists. Chocolate, spices, tobacco products, colognes, Cuban jewelry, and accessories are all available. But there are a few authentic shops as well: an herbalists' apothecary, a Santeria talismonger, and the oldest café in all of Cuba. Café Taberna has been in continuous operation since 1772. Almost everyone who was anyone sat for at least one cup of their potent brew, and many traditional singers and bands that went on to fame and fortune performed on their tiny stage.

CENTRAL TRAIN STATION

Like everything else connected to tourism in Cuba, the Central Train Station is designed to be a pleasant experience. Sanitation workers in spotless uniforms continuously clean and polish, restroom attendants offer guests a variety of toiletry products, individual leaning chairs for matrix access without interference or ambient noise are always available, and every smiling person is unfailingly happy to see each tourist. Antique first-class railway cars from France, updated with modern amenities, carry tourists by high-speed rail to almost anywhere in Cuba, and of course the bar and dining cars are always first rate. Over ten million tourists ride the trains every year and National Police Security, dressed as their busboy, porter, or fellow tourist, ensures none are ever molested.

- Tickets are 50 to 150 nuyen, depending on destination. No guns, no smoking, no fun.
- Traveler Jones

FLORIDITA

The historic seafood restaurant and cocktail bar, most famous for creating the first daiquiri and being Ernest Hemingway's hangout, still attracts thousands of tour-

ists each year. But these days it's most widely known for what is still called Bartending School, where brewmaster witches and warlocks come from all over the world to learn or master their craft under the tutelage of Brewmaster Gladys Hemlock, and tourists come from just as far to taste their progress.

- Some of the hippest "potions" and brewmasters have been coming out of Cuba. You'll find Floridita graduates at Club Penumbra, Blind Beggar, Vesuvio, and Vertigo.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

HAVANA BAY

Havana Bay was the main port of Cuba for over five hundred years. However, generations of crumbling piers and pollution eventually took their toll. In 2009 it was determined that dredging the bay to accommodate the ever-larger vessels that were dominating the cargo and tourist markets would destabilize the area around the harbor, threatening the historic heart of Havana. Facilities to meet the needs of leviathan-class cruise ships—and resorts to meet the needs of their passengers—were built outside eastern Havana and the massive project to turn Mariel Bay into a major port for Triple-E cargo ships was begun. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were devoted to revitalizing the harbor—mostly cleanup of the water, removal of deteriorating piers and buildings, and clearing sunken hulks and other debris from the floor of the bay—but it was determined that while there were ways to deepen and improve the harbor, it wouldn't be enough for the super ships, and it would be prohibitively expensive

That was before Enrique Martinez became president. He designated Havana Harbor the main base of the Caribbean League Navy, and what had been too much for a single nation to spend on boosting tourism became a reasonable amount for the League to invest in the home of its fleet. Monolithic walls, deep-earth anchors, and retaining spells were used to stabilize the banks of the Entrada Canal and the harbor itself as they were widened and deepened. He pushed the budget as far as he could. While erecting modern piers to serve the navy's cruisers, for example, expanding the project to upgrade the civilian infrastructure to facilitate supply made low-cost logistic sense.

Enrique didn't try to sell the League on completely revitalizing the harbor district, but with the major financial and engineering problems solved the once unattainable goal was in reach. The process is ongoing—between two-thirds and three-quarters complete depending on who you ask—but there is now a yacht marina, "traditional" piers for small, island-hopping sailboat cruises along Ensenada de Atarés, and expanded facilities for intra-League trade. Perhaps the single biggest improvement, in terms of bringing in the tourist nuyen, is the modern ferry terminal able to dock a half-dozen high-speed ferries from ports all across the Gulf Coast loaded with passengers who can't afford yachts or cruise ships.

- Story time: In the early years, the Mafia and Lady Guadalupe didn't see eye to eye on how to run Havana. Sabotage was Don Sugarcane's tactic of choice in applying pressure to get his way. This caused some serious conflicts with Zobop, as the Mafia's sabotage seriously raised pollution levels in the bay, which degraded reagents and pissed off the spirit community. "Sugarcane" was killed in his pool by something crawling through the pipes. That pool's drain line was clogged with Sugarcane for months. When Don "Smoke" came into power, he didn't want to fight both Martinez and Zobop. So he paid the Zobop's price and refocused the Mafia's strategy.
- Kane

HAVANA TUNNEL

Cutting across the northern mouth of Entrada Canal at Havana Bay is the Havana Tunnel connecting Eastern Havana to Old Havana. The tunnel is built parallel to the original, built in the 1950s, but deeper down (the original is long gone, destroyed in an early attempt to make Havana a deepawater harbor). It's 740 meters long and wide enough for eight lanes of traffic—four going each way, separated by closely spaced load-bearing pillars. A dual ventilation system with separate fresh air towers keeps the air breathable if not fresh. Only one lane in either direction carries cars, and another is devoted to scooters and cococabs. The government leases the other four lanes to street merchants, food wagons, and a growing number of more permanent commercial tenants, including coffin motels.

- That doesn't mention the galleries above the traffic. The idea had been safe passage for pedestrians and cyclists, but now they're rows of shops and venders of all sorts of surprising things. It's a good place for meets. Loud enough to discourage eavesdropping, metal enough to screw with bugs, and far enough underwater to blind GPS.
- Traveler Jones

- The Tunnel Coffin Motel is not for the claustrophobic. The door isn't soundproof, and traffic's rumbling by less than a meter from your head. And if you worry about such things, you're buried under thousands of tons of water and concrete. On the bright side, cars only crash into the motel or shops a few times every year.
- Darwin

- Please. If you're too drunk or too high or just need to crash, for five nuyen an hour you get a sturdy door that locks and a safe place to pass out.
- Coral Reefer

KNIGHT ERRANT CASTLE (SAN SALVADOR)

The Fortress of San Salvador was the sister to Morro Castle, and the two guarded the entrance to Havana Harbor between them. San Salvador was destroyed by British bombardment in 1762, and it remained a picturesque ruin until restored to its original specs—with the addition of electricity and indoor plumbing—as a historical site, museum, and park in 1997. In 2062, on the three hundredth anniversary of its destruction, Cuba signed a contract with Knight Errant to secure the City of Columns and Havana Harbor and gave them ships in Havana Bay. While there was no official name change, most people call it Knight Errant Castle. Their flag flies from the ramparts, and their colors have been added throughout as accents to native granite blocks. Knight Errant has added two helicopter pads, modern perimeter security, and two rapid-deployment ramps for small watercraft on the canal and bay side. The exterior front of the fortress, plus a tiny museum and souvenir shop, are open to the tourists. Children twelve and under are issued honorary Knight Errant badges.

- Knight Errant got a really rad pad out of the deal. Not to mention that even though this is a tiny contract for Ares, it's a foot in the door that may lead to operations throughout the League.
- Darwin

- More like kept out of the way. The president didn't let them get close enough to work their way into the hearts of the other nations in the League. Also, Cuba can rent the space they would have taken up in the city to corporations for ten times the nuyen.
- BTL Bailey

LA COUBRE TRAIN STATION

La Coubre, named for the French munitions freighter that exploded mysteriously in the 1960s, is the central train station for Cuban nationals. Tourists and foreigners are directed to the Central Train Station. Where the tourist trains emphasize comfort and luxury, everything about the citizens' trains speaks to efficiency and economy. Nothing is broken, but everything is worn. All of the fixtures, furniture, and equipment are either cheap industrial grade or salvaged from the tourist lines. This sometimes makes for unusual juxtapositions, such as an uninsulated train car with plastic benches and brocade carpeting. There is no plumbing, commodes are seats over holes in the floor just as they were on trains a century and a half ago, and any food or drink is brought aboard by the passengers. There is no air conditioning, just air circulating through open window frames that can be covered with translucent panels in a storm. Smoking is allowed, and every porous surface is infused with the scent of cheap cigar smoke. Matrix access is unreliable and noisy. No Cuban rides Cuban trains for fun, but all Cubans ride the trains. They are the cheapest, fastest, and (comparatively) safest way to get from any part of the island to another.

- Tickets are cheap, but the prices are fluid. If you look like you're a local, two or three nuyen. If you're from another province, eight or nine. If you look like you've got money or from somewhere off island, the sky's the limit. Expect to pay at least thirty nuyen.
- Darwin

- Quick note on weapons and armor. Visible weapons require a transportation fee. That's usually about twenty-five nuyen to a hundred nuyen, using Darwin's payment schedule. Hidden weapons are free. Unless they catch you. Then you get ejected from a moving train. On the bright side, they aren't all that fast. No charge for body armor, but if you're wearing heavy stuff there's going to be a betting pool on how long before the heat and humidity take you out.
- Traveler Jones

- Who polices the train?
- Turbo Bunny

- No one and everyone. You pay the fees before you get on board. Some of your fellow passengers might be cops, or train security, gang members, or peaceful citizens on their way home. You don't know. The important thing is that for all their individualism, Cubans stick together. When the guy who spots your hidden gun gives a shout, the whole car's going to help him throw you off the train.
- Coral Reefer

MORRO CASTLE

Morro Castle sits at the entrance of Havana Bay, opposite Knight Errant Castle. Of the four fortresses built to protect Havana, it's the only one that's an active military installation. Morro Castle has been refitted with missile batteries and anti-aircraft defense systems and connected to La Cabaña. Ares gave a sizable allotment of ten-year-old ordnance as a gift to President Enrique while they subleased Guantanamo Bay. There was no quid pro quo, as far as anyone knows, though there was probably a long-term investment in future business opportunities with the Martinez family. It's no coincidence that the new navy docks are directly under Morro's protection.

PASEO MARTÍ

Paseo Martí runs south from Knight Errant Castle to Fraternity Park and marks the border between Central Ha-

vana and Old Havana. It is popular with tourists more interested in Cuba than Cuban nightlife, shade trees and marble benches are conveniently spaced along its broad sidewalks and a discreet army of cleaners keeps everything spotless. Perhaps the only thing marring the street's perfection is the wall surrounding the City of Columns obscuring what should be a view of the bay.

Museums line the street on either side, separated by little pockets of greenery and perhaps a fountain. Political and social museums predominate—the Museum of the Revolution chronicles Fidel Castro's rise to power, the Napoleonic Museum showcases Napoleon's life and French culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the largest dedicated collection outside of France, and the Museum of Independence which features the history of the Caribbean League with particular emphasis on the Martinez family. The Museo de Historia Natural is dedicated to the plants and animals of the Caribbean, including metaspecies, and El Capitolio, the Science Academy, hosts an overview of technological development, particularly sailing ships, and their impact on culture. There are art museums, of course, where one can find original works by Cuban masters—Garaicoa, Leal, Sánchez, Mariño, Estévez—along with exciting new works by contemporary artists.

There are a few art galleries and shops that specialize in local crafts where well-heeled tourists can buy examples of authentic Cuban art. Mr. Orsel, the owner of Embargo, Inc., stages a few 1950s-vintage American cars on the street as a photo op for tourists. It's doubtful any could afford one of his vehicles, but he never tires of telling anyone interested about the history of cars in Cuba.

Fraternity Park, at the southern end of the street, was originally built to celebrate the friendship and common spirit of all nations in the Americas. During the VITAS years, the bronze sculptures representing the countries and cultures of the two continents and the Caribbean were stolen. They weren't replaced until Enrique Martinez commissioned new ones, reflecting how the world had changed, including statues for the major corporations. Atzlan is not represented. Security maintains a highly visible presence to prevent vandalism or theft.

Surprisingly enough, there are places to stay on Paseo Martí, usually above or behind the shops and galleries. Their prices are prohibitive.

- International friendship? Crazy dictators would be more like it. Of course, pointing that out in public could get you shot.
- Pyramid Watcher

- The better show is at the Academy of Sciences, where they have on display a real pirate ship and a history of ships and piracy in Cuba. They have a room where you can sit down and watch all sixty episodes of *Cyberpirates of the Caribbean*.
- Swash and Buckle

- Hired a few runners to correct the history in a few of those episodes. They conflated me with Chocolat on more than one occasion—that's just sloppy. Had my people add some AR from the actual fights to try and breathe some life into those crappy simulations.
- Kane

PLAZA VIEJA

Decades ago, the Plaza Vieja was restored to its original beauty. The parking lot surrounding the dry fountain was replaced with hand-fit stones, and the fountain itself restored. All plastics, concrete, or anything else modern was taken out of the two-story houses that ring the plaza and replaced with original materials. There are no addresses on Plaza Vieja; each building is an individual, known by its name. But while no two are alike, they share common features that express an openness to the world around them: broad windows that fill the rooms with light and fresh air, spacious balconies, and high ceilings allow breezes to blow freely through. The result was a harmonious flow of mana within to plaza with little background count stemming from the revitalized fountain.

- You'd expect some background count from all the bullfights, executions, and fiestas the plaza witnessed over the years. Repetitive events have impact. Maybe the flow from the fountain has washed them away.
- Abracadavre

Though the buildings around the plaza were once homes and are called houses, very few are private dwellings today. Most of the houses are restaurants and coffee shops catering to customers who appreciate their surroundings. A few are bed and breakfasts, with bedrooms on the upper floor, and a rarer few have second-floor apartments for the impeccable renter. Two are cabarets. Discreet AROs, isolated from the environment, give new visitors guidance in finding what they're looking for.

ZHAO TONG MARINA

Sculptures of colorful dragons swimming under the water guide boats into Zhao Tong Marina, an engaging fusion of Cuban and Chinese cultures. The docks that once served small freighters have been converted into dozens of slips for motor yachts and other pleasure craft twelve meters or smaller. The cranes have been replaced with fueling stations and the stacks of cargo containers are gone. In their place are shops for bait, tackle, fast food, and incidentals people often forget when traveling. Zhao Tong is a businessman who made his fortune betting on Cuba's future—with particular skill in buying cheap real estate decades before it became worth a fortune. Though Zhao Tong lives in Ha-

ORSEL ALVAREZ

Metatype: Elf
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Shadow Service
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Weapons (blades)
Personal Life: Familial relationships
Description: Embargo, Inc., owned by Orsel Alvarez, fabricates authentically detailed century-old car bodies for modern chassis. Even after several generations, the 1950s American car is still a mark of very special status in Cuba. Don't be surprised to see a successful Cuban rigger inordinately proud of his classy looking "antique." Embargo, Inc., is where you need to go for a quality vehicle tricked out in Caribbean style.

MARIA JAUREGUI

Metatype: Human
Sex: Female
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 2
Type: Support
Preferred payment method: Currency
Hobbies/Vice: Nothing of interest or of use
Personal Life: In relationship
Description: Maria Jauregui runs the Café Taberna. While she tolerates the tourists who bring in so much revenue, she resents how they dilute the ambiance by ordering soykaf and (soy formed) pork steak. She'd much prefer to share a meal with her friends while listening to son nuevo music. She reserves balcony seating for her friends to enjoy their meals undisturbed.

ZHAO TONG

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Old
Connection Rating: 7
Type: Personal Favor, networking
Preferred payment method: Service (free-labor jobs)
Hobbies/Vice: Social habits (smoking)
Personal Life: Single
Description: Zhao Tong is one of the last old-school private investors and lodge master for the Sleeping Dragon under Waves. He is 127 years old, and leónization treatments aren't as effective as they once were. Mr. Tong has lived in Cuba since the days of Fidel and has invested in many projects and ventures over the years. He now enjoys the comfort decades of shrewd investments have earned him. He lives in Fidel's old home, which he has arranged to be converted into a museum after he dies.

GLADYS HEMLOCK

Metatype: Human
Sex: Female
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Networking
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Bad habits (illegal drugs)
Personal Life: In relationship
Description: Gladys is the latest brewmaster witch working at the Floridita. She teaches small classes of Awakened students the art of entertainment and pouring various popular drinks.

HOST: EL FLORIDITA

Rating	Attack	Sleaze	Data Proc.	Firewall
3	6	3	4	5

Installed IC: Crash x 2, Jammer
Slaved Devices: Security Cameras x 3, Door Locks
Spiders: None
Sculpting: The Floridita is sculpted as a room with a large cauldron surrounded by multiple shelves of ingredients. The correct combination of ingredients in the proper order must be added to the cauldron to access cameras, locks, and paydata. Too many mistakes and nasty zombie-like IC emerge from the cauldron.

vana, on rare occasion he stays aboard his luxury junk docked at the marina.

- The marina looks very high end, unless you look deep. Instead of cleaning up, he paved everything over and sealed it under a half meter of concrete.
- Kane

- For those who don't know: Zhao Tong's family has been investing in Cuba since the communist revolution. He's been here almost that long. There were rumors he was one of the shadowy board members for Wuxing. But those swimming dragons are his way of telling those who understand that he's with the Triad.
- Swash and Buckle

PLAYA

From the Almendares River in the east to Santa Fe in the west, this costal region has become the commercial hub of Havana. Martinez had wanted the unsightly industrial works along the west end of the bay removed as part of restoring and romanticizing Havana and its harbor. He chose Hemingway Marina and the Jaimanitas River as their new location, far enough west to be out of sight but not so far as to present transportation problems. Construction for the industrial port destroyed the once beautiful estuary, and its daily operations—including small but frequent oil spills or chemical leaks—soon made the area toxic. Residents who could afford to moved out, selling their homes for fractions of what they'd paid or abandoning them. Residents who couldn't afford to leave made do the best they could of blackened beaches, treeless parks, and filter masks for the whole family.

- Pretty Boy ruined that area because he wanted to keep the tankers and cargo ships close to his navy. It was a stopgap measure meant to last only until Mariel was upgraded
- Swash and Buckle

ALMENDARES RIVER

In its last stretch down to the sea the Almendares River divides Seaside from Revolution Plaza. There was a time when the water was clean—in fact it was the source of fresh water in that part of the city. Of course, that was before an oil refinery, a rum distillery, a waste material recycling plant, and a couple of factories that don't advertise their purpose were built along its banks. Enrique Martinez built desalination plants off the coast of Seaside to try and make up for the loss. Even so, fresh water has to be rationed.

- That water is brought to storage tanks, and each citizen is assigned a specific tank for getting their water. The squatters and those living in the barrens have to use grey water from irrigation systems. Getting caught trying to steal clean water means a beating from police and citizens.
- Darwin

One of the best places to eat here is the Santa Dorotea de Luna de la Chorrera—Chorrera Fortress for short. Chorrera was built in the sixteenth century to defend the mouth of the river, one of a chain of fortresses built along the coast. It even had a moat—still does, though it's dry. Cross the drawbridge and you'll find sixteenth century Spanish armor and brass canons, all beautifully restored, positioned along the walls of a classic Spanish—not Cuban—restaurant. The restaurant also has a boat for patrons who would like to dine at sea.

- They're not the only ones serving up meals on the water. Cap'n Jack's got an eight-meter open motor launch set up with a grill and a deep fryer. He cruises out to the sport fishing and tour boats and prepares whatever the tourists have caught right before their eyes. It's dinner and a show if he doesn't burn his boat down to the waterline.
- Swash and Buckle

CHAN SENG BOWLING

Chan Seng Bowling always catered to the local families, not the tourists. Twenty lanes and a kid-friendly eatery tucked between the fancy restaurants and cocktail lounges and the warehouses. Now it's tucked between cheap dives and abandoned buildings. The roof leaks and the lanes are warped and rotting. The only thing that's expanded is the eatery, mismatched tables and chairs everywhere except on the lanes. They serve cheap soy and an array of spices that should be expensive but aren't in order to make the food taste any way you like. No one cares who you are or what your story is, and people trying to get off the island sit next to people who jumped ship to get on the island. It's a good place to not get noticed.

HEMINGWAY MARINA

Prior to 2035 Hemingway was an upper-middle-class and working-class community. The upper middle class had jobs that paid enough for a good house and a boat big enough to need a slip in the marina. (There was also a small fleet of local fishing boats, but they had their own docks some distance from the marina.) The working class cleaned those good houses and big boats, and did pretty much everything else their employers didn't want to do. All that changed when Martinez decided the Almenadares estuary was a perfect short-term location for an industrial port. The government offered the residents relocation deals, moving them to renovated parts of Havana. Then they bulldozed the

houses and small business to make room for warehouses and cranes. Commercial wharfs replaced the boat docks—some of them in the Almendares River itself. The entire cargo and oil facility is still called Hemingway Marina and several thousand people work the docks and warehouses, but no one lived there while the port was in operation.

- The relocation deals were lopsided. The ones with money or connections did all right, but a lot of working people gave up homes they'd worked for and got dumped in public tenements.
- Swash and Buckle

In 2045 the Mariel Bay Port project was competed, and ninety-nine percent of the traffic that had been using Hemingway Marina switched to the new, huge, thoroughly modern complex. There are still a few legitimate ships using the marina—gypsy freighters carrying island trade, a couple of budget operations—but most of the traffic these days wouldn't stand up to close inspection. For a fee anyone can dock for fuel and repairs or transfer cargo and passengers. For a few more nuyen, no one will remember you were there. There are a bars catering to whoever crews the ships, brothels, places to eat that are almost restaurants, even a couple of half-decent, semi-legitimate places to buy and sell contraband, and a few places to stay that are not overrun by vermin. The marina has a few permanent residents. Some have been there since before the marina went commercial, too stubborn to leave when they had the chance. Others are more recent arrivals, drawn by the financial opportunities offered by the new environment. Perhaps the most famous resident is Commodore Diaz, the harbormaster.

- Commodore Diaz has built his own little kingdom among the docks. With his four sons and some good trade negotiations, he managed to sew the place up before the Batista. He still pays them a percentage in addition to his government fees, but other than that he's pretty much autonomous.
- Kane

- Not everyone likes this. Pirates and smugglers who use the marina have to pay the Commodore, the Batista, and the president to do business. They want to cut out the middlemen, and the Commodore is the most vulnerable.
- Swash and Buckle
- Someone's been trying to get Capo Esrich to take over the marina. They may have finally met his price. Word is Esrich and Diaz have been having some heated exchanges.
- BTL Bailey

CAPO JOSEPH ESRICH

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Networking
Preferred payment method: Barter (food stuffs)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habits (Eating)
Personal Life: Single
Description: Capo Jose is a heavyset man who's comfortable collecting fees and eating seafood. The Don was not pleased with his inability to secure more businesses for the Family when the government was looking for someone to buy out their operations. Esrich was happy with the way things were, and his bids to take on more work and headaches were half-hearted at best. These days several pirate gangs are lighting fires under Capo Esrich, trying to motivate him to become more involved in the neighborhood and to take over the Hemingway Marina.

COMMODORE DIAZ

Metatype: Dwarf
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Legwork, Shadow Service
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Family Obligations
Personal Life: Family
Description: Commodore Diaz isn't a seafaring man, but he likes the concept. He lives on the well-maintained remains of a yacht abandoned ages ago. He appointed himself harbormaster when the government left and gave himself the rank of commodore to remind boat captains of their relative authority. Today Diaz, along with his four sons, operates the fuel refinery, the power and water stations, and a small but well-equipped repair dry dock. If you need to get a ship into "shipshape," take it to the Commodore at Hemingway Marina.

REVOLUTION PLAZA

While Old Havana is the soul of Cuba, Revolution Plaza is its spirit. Many millions of dollars were spent restoring the Plaza and rebuilding the surrounding neighborhood. With enough casinos, lounges, and hotels to give Vegas a run for its money, Revolution Plaza delivers enough spectacle and entertainment to keep tourists delighted as they go broke. Four million SINners every year do exactly that.

- Speaking of Vegas, the majority of the interior fixtures, furniture, and decorations were purchased wholesale from Las Vegas. A tax-deductible gift from the Verontesse family to the Batista family.
- Plan 9

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS CEMETERY

Close by Revolution Square is the Christopher Columbus Cemetery, more widely known as the Necropolis Cristobal Colon—one hundred and forty acres of mausoleums holding the remains of well over a million individuals. Built in 1896, the necropolis has fallen into ruin and been restored several times, with varying success. The architecture throughout, beginning with the massive wrought-iron gate set in a towering arch at the main entrance, was designed by Calixo Arellano de Loira to remind all of us that death comes equally to paupers and kings. Originally all were welcome, but these days, once death had come to them, only the wealthy and powerful are interred here. Or cremated and niched. The common people may conduct funeral services in the chapels here before transporting the departed to a more modest final resting place. As with the Cities of the Dead in New Orleans, the Necropolis Cristobal is the site of daily celebrations of life and death, sometimes several in a single day. The ceremonies and attire of faiths brought by exiles from all the Americas blend in a kaleidoscope of worship. Tourists, wandering among the beautiful monuments of marble and granite, often mistake these celebrations for shows. Occasionally tourists will be startled by the appearance of a "zombie" or similar apparition. Also wandering the alleys of the necropolis are peddlers of charms, blessings, and mystical protections—all of dubious value, as their sole purpose is to separate gullible tourists from their nuyen.

- The zombies are as fake as the charms and blessings. They're street performers, painted like distressed marble to fool the tourists. Only Mama Pauvre controls zombies at the cemetery, and they aren't there to entertain the tourists.
- Abracadavre

The Central Chapel of the necropolis is an imposing octagon of Mediterranean design. Funereal services of all faiths can, by special arrangement, still be conducted in the sanctuary on the ground floor, but the rest of the building is off limits. The Central Chapel is the home of Mama Pauvre of the Zobop. There are chambers in the upper floors that can be rented for various ritual ceremonies, and Mama Pauvre is more than happy to supply materials and music appropriate to the service. Unbeknownst to the tourists and most Cubans, catacombs beneath the mausoleums allow special clientele access and secret places for more unique ceremonies.

- Nothing stays buried for long here if it can be put to good use.
- Darwin

In the crypts beneath the Central Chapel are an auction house of zombies, corps cadavres, Sukuyan slaves, and Awakened creatures and plants. Necromancers and alchemists, mainly of the Obeah tradition, can create magical compounds to enslave both the living and the dead. Awakened individuals can find reagents or restricted Awakened drugs at the Central Chapel. The steep admission price ensures that only serious buyers attend, and all transactions must be conducted in person. The meters-thick stone walls are the least of the crypts' defenses.

- The rules of what can and can't be done by practitioners of Voudoun or Obeah are set by generations of tradition. But in the Zobop, under Mama Pauvre, it's a bit different. She follows the common rules of conduct they all do to avoid conflict, and she'll show respect for the tradition of whoever she's dealing with. But that's just for business. For the Zobop, Mama Pauvre's word is law.
- Abracadavre

- Mama Pauvre looks and acts sweet, but that's the danger. All of the Zobop are very persuasive and good at putting you at ease. Just remember: Even though she reminds you of your grandmother, those are not cookies she's asking you to deliver.
- Traveler Jones

HOTEL NACIONAL

From the 1930s through the 1950s, the Hotel Nacional was the address of choice for anyone who was anyone when they were in Cuba. American movie stars, famous musicians, dignitaries, and even a few monarchs stayed in its luxury suites. It was here that American Mafia and the Costa Nostra held their first summit. When Castro came to power, ostentatious displays of wealth fell out of favor, and the grand building rotted from neglect for decades. Lady Guadalupe ordered its restoration the first year she was in power. But she wanted it done right, everything meticulously restored to its former grandeur, but with all the conveniences of the twenty-first century. It took time, but in 2038, the Hotel Nacional reopened. By day the hotel lobby, filled with memorabilia and ARO recordings of events associated to the hotel, is always open to the public—as are the Starlight Terrace Bar and the Parisién Casino. But when evening comes, anyone who is not a guest must leave. If anyone who is not connected tries to make a reservation at the Hotel Nacional, they discover the hotel's five hundred rooms, fifteen suites, and even the presidential suite are always booked for the foreseeable future.

- Following the money trail: The government sold it to the Batista for reasons unknown just before it opened. Batista immediately sold it to the Vory to pay a debt. And from that moment to this, the deals have been on a constant spin cycle. Six months ago the Batista took possession, again, and then sold it to the Triad in a turf settlement. The Triad sold it to Zobop for no reason. They immediately turned around and sold it to the Vory, who as we speak are negotiating a sale with the Batista. You get the idea. It looks like chaos, but that's all it is: looks. Nothing is really happening. No funds change hands and day to day operation of the hotel is seamless. All parties concerned are cooperating in a whiteout-level snow job.
- The Chromed Accountant

This is because the hotel is neutral ground, set aside for criminal organizations to negotiate their differences. The upper floors contain conference rooms with dedicated communications, trid projectors, and house spiders to prevent any conversations from being overheard or recorded. Summits are rare, but not unheard of. To end or prevent a war, the heads of the organizations meet. Otherwise they send representatives or officers to negotiate. But not just the conference rooms are neutral—the whole place is. Anyone from any organization with enough money and clout can stay here without worry. The one ironclad rule: Don't bring your "work" to the Nacional. A Mr. Winston oversees the hotel, the casino, and everything else at the Hotel Nacional. Inside that building his word is law; that's recognized by all the bosses. The neutral zone is valuable—negotiations at the hotel there have saved them millions of nuyen—and they won't jeopardize it. Anyone who breaks the rules is on their own against Mr. Winston.

- Mr. Winston acts as though he's completely independent, but he can bring serious firepower to bear fast if he needs to. There's speculation he's got the backing of the Vory or Batista or one of the others, but he couldn't be and remain neutral. My personal theory is he's working for Martinez. And I think the bosses are good with that. The government helping the mobs keep order—it's all very Cuban.
- Plan 9

REVOLUTION SQUARE

Revolution Square is 72,000 square meters of open space. What was a place of politics and protests has evolved into the biggest party venue of the Caribbean. Cuba's ministries had migrated to Old Havana, which was becoming the capital of the League under Enrique, and Revolution Square sat mostly empty until Ray Martinez came to power. The ugly Soviet-era office buildings were converted into first-class casinos and hotels, all run unobtrusively by the government. The casinos—Lucky Luciano, San Souci, and the Flamingo—are the big draws and the big moneymakers. Bands play for people dancing in the square, which is illuminated by drone lighting that pulses to the music. Security is everywhere but undercover, keeping the tourists laying the golden eggs safe without being seen.

- The Flamingo is technically operated by the Batista. But if you're getting down to that level of detail, you might as well say the Flamingo belongs to the Russian government. They're the ones who underwrote the Flamingo's construction.
- Plan 9

- You could say the same for Lucky Luciano's, but that money trail leads to CAS. DSI anyone?
- The Chromed Accountant

At night the plaza itself is one large dance club—or several, depending on your perspective. Bands from traditional to trending to everything in between stake out positions just far enough apart not to interfere with each other. Rolling bars and food wagons, specializing in shots and bite-sized morsels, follow winding circuits through the venue. Jinteros and jinteras—licensed street performers who might be sleight-of-hand magicians, acrobats, dance partners, or prostitutes—mingle with the tourists who think they're experiencing the forbidden side of Havana. There's no place to sit in this active landscape. You eat, drink, and keep on dancing.

- The only places to sit are the courtyards of the casinos and hotels. They serve up delicious but pricey meals or cocktails that always include a few free chips to lure you to the gaming tables.
- Pistons
- Public urination was a problem at Revolution Square, even when spotless public restrooms could be accessed from any courtyard. Guys who drank too much seemed to think it was too far to walk. Havana's civil engineers solved the problem by installing a dozen S-K popup urinals. Activated by commlink, they move up and down quickly enough to be moderately discreet.
- BTL Bailey

- Yeah, that's if the guy's sober enough to get to one and operate it. Speaking of which, there is another service that the Plaza provides: a cheap DocWagon knockoff bracelet. If you pass out, they'll send someone to pick you up.
- Coral Reefer

Che Guevara's image now shares space with Lady Guadalupe, the two looking out over the Plaza. Smaller images of Enrique Martinez and Garcia Batista look down from hotel walls.

- The José Martí Memorial is still there. During the day it's an AR travel guide with a simplified historical commentary. By night all politics disappear behind light effects, and it becomes a guide to musicians and bands around the plaza.
- Traveler Jones

- Things have come full circle. Under "El Hombre" Batista's rule, his family ran casinos and had a million slot machines. When Fidel came into power, he not only kicked out the Batista family, he destroyed all the casinos and gambling houses. After Castro was gone the Batista family returned, made a deal with Ray Martinez, and brought the casinos back to Cuba.
- Kane

VEDADO

Vedado used to mean a forbidden place, a jungle buffer between the town and pirates along the coast. Now it's all paved over. Between Seaside and Central Havana, Vedado is a mundane expanse of dry cleaners, electricians, plumbers, mechanics, and the hundreds of other small jobs that keep Havana running. The residents who live in the tracts of tiny houses or the Soviet-era condos spend their lives trying to earn enough nuyen to pay the obligatory bribes and still have enough left over for food and rent. There is a modest nightlife. People come to clubs like Zorra, Gato, the Don, and few others to hear music and musicians from other parts of the Americas. But like the tourists, Cubans with money to spend on entertainment either head north to the Malecón for food and music or east to Revolution Square to gamble and party like it's their last day on Earth.

CENTRAL HAVANA

Central Havana is the city's primary shopping district. Malls and stores line the streets to entice the tourist with tailored clothes, bottles of Havana Club rum, Cohiba Cuban cigars, and expensive cars. Down less mainstream paths are red-light districts for prostitution and BTL dens.

CHINATOWN

Once populated exclusively by Chinese Cubans, these barrens have become home to hundreds of thousands

CAPO PEREZ "SUAVE" ANGULO

Metatype: Ork
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 4
Type: Networking
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Smoking)
Personal Life: In a relationship

Description: Capo Suave, as the ladies call him, has the constitution to drink anyone under the table, dance until all hours, and be an engaging conversationalist on into daylight. He also has the latest tech to record every embarrassing act, blurted secret, and damaging admission made by the unwary and the inebriated, as he remains stone-cold sober and alert throughout. You have security to prevent that? He's got the nuyen and dirty secrets to make them look the other way. He briefs the Don daily on interesting discoveries and can ferret out any information the Don might need to influence events. Capo Suave lives for the now, and the long term doesn't interest him; anything, any information he trades for must be immediately valuable.

MAMA PAUVRE

Metatype: Human
Sex: Female
Age: Old
Connection Rating: 9
Type: Swag, Legwork, or Personal Favor
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Entertainment (Music)
Personal Life: Widowed

Description: Mama Pauvre looks like everyone's ideal of a little old lady as she sits in her rocking chair, humming quietly and knitting. Don't mind that she does this in the middle of a cemetery. She is old school when she oversees the delivery of reagents and the necropolis marketplace. She has a pad of electronic paper to scribble notes and orders on as she walks through the central chapel, examining the wares before they are put out for sale. In the Crypt below, she also takes special care of the zombies and corps cadavres, making sure that they are presentable and that when auctioned off for servitude, they will not be abused.

MR. WINSTON

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 6
Type: Networking or Legwork
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Personal Grooming (Clothes)
Personal Life: Divorced

Description: Mr. Winston is a charming gentleman with a cultivated English accent who runs the Hotel Nacional. While not a Cuban, he has made Cuba his home, and his obvious love for the island and his personal charm put his customers at ease. Mr. Winston is very selective when it comes to guests at the Hotel Nacional. Anyone presentable and well behaved can party at the hotel's Parisién Casino until 5 p.m. But unless you have a good reputation or belong to "family," you'll find yourself on the pavement at 5:05 at the latest.

HOST: HOTEL NACIONAL

Rating	Attack	Sleaze	Data Proc.	Firewall
7	10	8	9	7

Installed IC: Binder, Blaster x 2, Marker, Probe, Tar Baby, Track
Slaved Devices: Cameras, Door and Window Locks, Conference Room Communications.
Spiders: 2
Sculpting: Hotel Nacional is sculpted in realistic form and physics. Extra floors for multiple virtual conference rooms expand the number of existing floors to twelve. IC appears as stereotypical Mafia muscle carrying various forms of weapons.

of impoverished refugees from all across the Americas. All are looking for work—not just to eat, but because applying for citizenship with all its benefits requires a steady, paying job. They'll take any menial task, doing the things no one else will to maintain the more desirable parts of the city. Of course, not being citizens means the refugees get no rations, so they'll do any job. Like accept conscription on a ship so their family will eat. The Triad recruits refugees to smuggle and distribute BTLs, and that market has been expanding as BTLs supplant drugs as the users' escape of choice.

Chinatown has become a warren of dilapidated buildings—crowded shacks with narrow paths where streets once were, push all the way to the Malecón seawall. From Paifang at the entrance to Chinatown proper, places like Ten Yuan Wok and Disco Chan's and a dozen other shops huddle under faded awnings on Cuchillo Street—the only completely Chinese section of the neighborhood left.

- Chinatown went from a population of 30,000 at the time of the VITAS outbreak to around 300,000 today. Early immigrants came from the League itself—looking for new opportunities in Cuba. The latest big wave consisted mainly of refugees fleeing the AZ-AM war.
- Baka Dabora

MALECON BOULEVARD

The Malecon Boulevard stretches west along the north coast from the Havana Tunnel past Vedado to the Almendares River bridge. Long ago it was a romantic trail favored by poets and romantics, but progress brought traffic and it eventually grew to be a six-lane highway. In recent decades major traffic arteries have been moved inland due to frequent and severe storms. Storms that prompted the Cuban government to erect a seawall to protect Old Havana from ever-increasing storm surges. The seawall was built up from the foundation of the six-lane highway, and a new, narrower Malecon Boulevard runs along its crest. Malecon Boulevard is restricted to pedestrian and pedal-vehicle traffic. It provides an excellent view of the sea to the north and historic Havana to the south, and staircases allow people from the Boulevard to descend into entertainment districts such as Vedado. The view of Havana is unspoiled because artfully placed awnings, walls, and stands of trees completely hide Chinatown and other impoverished areas from above. Needless to say, no stairways lead down into those neighborhoods.

- Many of the old buildings nearest the boulevard were allowed to collapse as a barrier to add more distance between the residents in barrens and the tourists on the wall.
- Darwin

PARTAGAS

Not far from the Academy of Science, you'll be hit in the face with the aroma of curing tobacco and confronted by the great colonial edifice of Cuba's oldest cigar factory, still in operation: Partagas. Anyone interested can get a virtual tour showing all the painstaking steps that go into making an authentic premium Cuban cigar. Actual production takes place behind several layers of sophisticated security—ostensibly to prevent any product or secrets from being stolen. A bit farther down the road is the Bellos factory—which was the Upmann factory before the Bellos family bought it from the government when they returned from exile. A much more modern complex with equally aggressive security producing both cigars and "essence" of Cuban cigars for the e-market. Across the street is the government's own cigar production facility, Corona, where very limited runs of a variety of old-fashioned, handmade cigars are produced. Yes, women make up most of the workforce; no, they do not roll the cigars on their thighs.

With real tobacco of the quality these cigars require being so scarce, all of the big three produce only enough to meet strict quotas and maintain the highest quality control throughout every step of the process. Between the three are half a dozen smoke shops where anyone can buy real and electronic cigars.

- There're no smoke-free zones or posted warnings about health hazards in this neighborhood. Unless you count "Don't even think of complaining about the smell." Expect hard stares from Cuban law enforcement personnel who may or may not be chomping on their free cigar. One premium Cuaba a week is the perk for keeping everything safe and quiet.
- Kane

- Stealing cigars from any of them is out of the question. But because Bellos produces more tobacco essence than cigars, there's a greater chance to pilfer tobacco leaves unnoticed. Especially since they have deals with some growers to get a few kilos above quota.
- Coral Reefer

REGLA

Regla is east of Old Havana on Havana Bay. In the nineteenth century it was a town settled by freed slaves, but it became a part of Havana and then a commercial and military district. The revitalization of Havana Bay has just reached Regla, and some of the docks and buildings are being restored or replaced. But the waterfront areas not taken up by the Navy Yard are still dominated by rusting refineries and abandoned canneries looking out over water stained with tar and diesel waste. There's a sixteenth-century church just meters from the sea where women—standing ankle deep in oily water

at high tide—sing and pray to Yemayá, the orisha of the sea. Some unique and striking examples of Afro-Cuban sculpture and painting can be found in the many impromptu art shows, and the residents maintain the parks, which are frequented by performers and traveling beer wagons.

- Unless you're a local, get some filters and boosts to your immunity. Those beer wagons are very unsanitary; even the fermented drinks can be unsafe.
- Swash and Buckle

NAVAL YARD

While it's sometimes dismissed as the Pretty Boy Navy, the Caribbean League Navy stationed in Regla is nothing to trifle with. While Enrique did, for the most part, purchase last-generation warships, he spared no expense in getting them upgraded and refitted with modern weapons and sensors. Among its more modern ships, the CLN fleet boasts three Tiburon-class corvettes and four Aohana-class frigates. They also field three refurbished Tacoma-class frigates, and at least a dozen Russian-era fast attack craft, all armed with the latest Trafalgar-designed ship-to-ship weapons systems. The dry docks have been upgraded to construct or repair two ships at a time.

- It looks like Ray Martinez picked up at least two Wasp-class amphibious assault class vessels from the CAS. Two are currently sitting in dry dock. An old design, but tough, and equipped with a spider commanding a small army of drones mounting hellfire and brimstone missiles—a considerable threat.
- Swash and Buckle

Commodore Serraza, who defected to the Caribbean League from Aztlan, has been overseeing the navy training for over twenty years. His tactics—including putting early warning listening stations on remote atolls—and insights into how Aztlan thinks have been invaluable in defending League waters from Aztechnology forces. Some Caribbean League members have been slow to accept the CLN as an asset of the League and not just Cuba. Others have accepted training by the commodore for joint actions, coordinating elements of the CLN as support for local ships defending their islands.

EASTERN HAVANA

The western portion of Eastern Havana, located eighteen kilometers east of Old Havana, is a sports mecca that continues to bring in fans of baseball, basketball, boxing, cricket, and urban brawl. The eastern portion of Eastern Havana is all beaches and resorts. There are seven named beaches that have been contracted as individual corporate retreats make up twenty-five kilo-

CAPO OSCAR CHUYN

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 4
Type: Networking
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Nothing of interest or of use
Personal Life: Single
Description: Oscar Chuyn is the only Chinese Batista in the family. A native of Chinatown, he joined the Three-Five gang as a kid and worked his way quickly up the ranks, becoming the gang's leader at twenty-four. He was ruthless and ambitious, leading the Three-Five gang against both the Habaneros and the Black Dahlia gangs for a bigger piece of Central Havana and Revolution Plaza. The gang wars got hot, spilling over into the open streets with enough violence to make tourists uncomfortable. A "representative of the government" gave Oscar a choice between retiring or being retired. He was still considering his options when the entire Black Dahlia gang disappeared. Fortunately for Oscar, the Don had taken notice of his work and offered him a job. Oscar now runs the Batista's labor racketeering operations.

RODOLFO SERRAZA, 'THE WIZARD OF AZ'

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 8
Type: Personal Favor
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Drinking)
Personal Life: None of your damn business
Description: Rodolfo Serraza, former Jaguar guard and practitioner of Aztec magic, is current commander of the Cuban fleet. He has trained two generations of Cuban sailors in strategic operation and counter tactics against Aztlan, Aztecnology, CAS, and even PCC. The Wizard of Az keeps covert patrols operating throughout League waters, so there's a chance one might be close enough for a pickup or rescue if needed.

meters of the coast: Boca Ciega, Brisas del Mar, Guanabo, Megano, Mi Cayito, Tarara, and Santa Maria del Mar. The rest of the coast is open beaches occasionally interrupted by sprawls from nearby towns.

AVERY TOWER

This ten-story greenhouse built by the McIlhenny family is the source of the most sought-after Tabasco sauce in the world, made with virus- and pollution-free peppers grown from seeds smuggled from their family farms in the bayou country of southern Louisiana. Considerable time and experimentation went into finding just the right blend of Cuban soils to replicate the ideal growing conditions. While the McIlhennys employ hundreds of Cuban citizens growing peppers and producing Tabasco sauce, and the government's percentage of their gross exports provides a steady stream of needed funds, what endeared the McIlhenny family to the people of Cuba was their diversification. Upon learning the spice crops on which Cuban cuisine depends—garlic, coriander, cumin, and oregano—had been all but destroyed, the McIlhennys undertook locating and cultivating pure varieties (as well as pepper varieties used in Cuban dishes). As a result, the McIlhennys are popularly, if informally, recognized as the family that brought Cuban cooking back to life. (They are also jokingly credited with saving thousands of Cubanos from starvation by making soy palatable.)

COJIMAR

Ernest Hemingway set his novel *The Old Man and the Sea* in Cojimar, a small fishing village just beyond the eastern outskirts of Havana. Now it is a desolate ruin on the shore of toxic Cojimar Bay. Once toxic runoff had killed the bay, it became a popular dumpsite for vehicles or machines wrecked or worn out beyond saving. During low tide, trucks and fishing boats and washing machines rust companionably together, their decaying corpses covering the oily mudflats. On rare occasions, scavengers pick through the wreckage, looking for salable parts or bits of metal. On extremely rare occasions, a desperate barrens dweller might try fishing in those waters, if he's starving badly enough to convince himself the tide has carried the worst of the poisons away, but it's hopeless. Nothing lives in the water. The nearest inhabited area is Alamar, practically next door. Once a pre-fab Soviet community, complete with stores and entertainment venues, after the counter-revolution it tried briefly to reinvent itself as the go-to party place for locals, but now it's just another barrens with fresher paint. What makes Cojimar and Cojimar Bay worth knowing is smuggling. A popular gambit for smugglers unwilling to bribe harbor police is to run a skiff or other small boat loaded with contraband in among the wrecks and offload the cargo onto a waiting truck. If the boat looks rough enough, it can hide in plain sight for days. Disposable boats are simply abandoned.

- Alamar has always been an ugly concrete jungle. The Havana Tunnel connects it to Old Havana, but it's a pass-through no one cares about.
- Darwin

EASTERN BEACHES

Eastern Beaches is a twenty-five-kilometer stretch of beaches that aren't immediately adjacent, but are linked together by the Via Blanca freeway. As part of Cuba's complex working relationship with various corporations, it leases these sections of the beachfront to them:

- Boca Ciega (Horizon Group)
- Brisas del Mar (Renraku Computer Systems)
- Guanabo (Ares Macrotechnology)
- El Megano (Saeder-Krupp Heavy Industries)
- Mi Cayito (NeoNET)
- Santa Maria del Mar (Mitsuhama Computer Technologies)
- Tarara (Wuxing Incorporated)

A few of the beaches have unique engineered features. Boca Ciega, for example, has augmented sand that changes color or generates musical tones when walked on. Tarara has a floating island just offshore with slips for a half dozen yachts. There is a deep trench off Santa Maria del Mar that allows deep sea diving within sight of the beach. Each corporations maintains floating docks for the shuttle boats from corporate cruise ships. Security on the corporate beaches is up to the corporation that leases the land, which means effectiveness and aggressiveness vary. The rest of the beaches are public and undeveloped. Lesser corporations that want waterfront accommodations compete for limited space in the crowded beaches and condos of Varadero. Others forego staying on the water, spending their money on better hotels in Old Havana and taking day trips if they want to go to the beach.

Flocks of laborers from Alamar and Chinatown head out to the beaches every day looking for work. Some get litter off the beaches, while others work the villas, cleaning up after parties. Some "workers" pilfer pineapples, tobacco leaves, or bits of sugarcane to sell the tourists. A few lucky ones get limited contracts to service the cruise ships with heavy duty cleansers and UV sanitizing drones.

- UV is also good for flushing stowaway vampires.
- Slamm-0!

- Norovirus and more resistant mutations still plague cruise ships. That's why corporations hire local cleaning crews. Any of them get sick or die, it won't be on the ship.
- Traveler Jones

The Eastern Beaches don't get as wild as Revolution Plaza—corporations keep tighter rein than the government—but there are jinteros and jinteras who slip past security to earn a few nuyen. Tour buses (sponsored and unsponsored) park just outside corporate grounds and try to entice tourists to come to Havana and see the "Real Cuba." Buffalo Bill is typical of these drivers, with his tropical-colored camel bus, on-board fruity flavored cocktails, and AR visual aids. Beyond the recreational limits of the corporate resorts are the aquaculture parks. These zones are off limits to fishing and feature artificial reefs made with sunken ships and forests of kelp designed to attract aquatic life and improve the local ecology—both because it's a good idea and because tourists will pay money to see these parks, and a lot more money to go diving along the reefs.

Customs enforcement along the resort beaches is a joint effort, with corporate security searching the ships and hotels then reporting to Cuban LE, while Cuban plainclothes officers check the buses and tourists riding them back and forth to Havana. It's all very unobtrusive—the last thing the resorts or the Cuban government want is to ruin the vacations they depend on.

- Enrique had a sense of humor when it came to sinking those ships for the coral reefs. They were all ships captured from pirates or Aztlan, stripped and scuttled and sunk. Except he'd give them AR tags that embellished the reputations of their former captains and dramatized their capture.
- Pyramid Watcher

SPORTS TOWN

To the west of Cojimar, an easy drive from anywhere in Havana or the resorts, is Sports Town. That's where you'll find the Pan American Stadium, home of the Pan American Games; it's also the official venue for cricket and soccer championships matches. The Sports Complex, with horse and drone tracks and the Caribbean Boxing Arena, is connected to the stadium by a pedestrian causeway that just happens to pass through the Pan American Casino.

Caribbean League Stadium is home to minor league and National League baseball championships. The Cuban League Series and the Super Series are still played at Latin American Stadium, but everything else baseball in the Caribbean comes to CLS.

- Baseball is so popular that the public grid gets a signal boost during the Super Series season so that no one will miss a game.
- Slamm-0!

For those interested in less-traditional sports, the Combat Biker Dome and Arena Brawl Dome are close by. The original plans called for the domes to be built on the beach, since the soft sand would be tough to traverse and force the teams to use some strategy along with brute force, however it was determined that being on the water would make it too easy to smuggle illegal gear into the matches. Instead both domes have artificial beaches, with sand traps so tricky the Texas Rattlers pay to train in the Combat Biker Dome.

Not far to the west of the stadium is the Havana Guerrillas' Urban Brawl Zone. It's the ruins of Cienfuegos, a small city abandoned in the 2030s. Squatters were driven out of the crumbling buildings in 2049 and walls were erected to ensure that weapons fire stay inside the Zone. Wouldn't do to have paying fans killed by stray shots. There's a baseball field in the middle of the Brawl Zone. It's used for a particularly violent, and thus entertaining, version of the game. The prize money is good, and any amateur team that can pay the entrance fee is welcome to try their luck.

- It can be literally combat baseball with pirates and gang-sponsored teams looking for their fifteen minutes of fame and a shot at the prize money.
- Slamm-0!

GUANABACOA

The restoration of Guanabacoa has not gone as quickly as that of Old Havana, but the president has been making progress. Guanabacoa is the birthplace, or one of the birthplaces, of Cuban music—what used to be a small town gobbled up by the growing city. There are more privately owned cafes and clubs here than you'll find in other neighborhoods, and they are there for the local people—more authentically Cuban than the ones that cater to the tourists. These are remnants of the independent individualists who challenged government control in the twentieth century and are now bucking against

BUFFALO BILL

Metatype: Troll
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Support
Preferred payment method: Cash (nuyen)
Hobbies/Vice: Entertainment (Trid Shows)
Personal Life: In a relationship
Description: Buffalo Bill earned his way out of the barrens of eastern Havana by rebuilding a decrepit camelback bus and adding enough flash and flair to attract tourists away from the cab stands. Today he owns and operates five tourist buses between the Eastern Beaches and Downtown. Two of the buses are built for parties, complete with dance floors and "sleeping cubes." For a few extra nuyen, Buffalo Bill can be a highly informative and useful personal tour guide.

AETHERPEDIA

CUBAN BASEBALL

Baseball is the most popular sport in Cuba. Havana boasts two major stadiums, but each of the other fifteen provinces has a large stadium of its own. And of course there are countless small fields and sandlots across the island. Baseball in Cuba is divided into four leagues, with overlapping seasons that cover the entire year: Caribbean Super Series, Cuban National League, Minor Leagues, and Urban Scrimmage Baseball League.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Each of the fifteen provinces on the island of Cuba has a National League team. While technically a province of Cuba, the Isle of Youth (Treasure Island) is not controlled by the government and its team, the "Pirates," is not recognized by the National League. The National League is open only to Cuban players. The rules and regulations covering the use of magical or cyber augmentations are stricter than those of the North American League, roughly equivalent to the NAL's restriction in the 2030s.

CARIBBEAN SUPER SERIES

The Super Series grew out of the Cuban All Star Series in which five teams, made up of the top players from the fifteen National League teams, competed for the title. The Caribbean Super Series now includes teams from every member of the Caribbean League and Yucatan. (Baseball is popular in Yucatan. When the country gained its independence in 2064, its baseball league petitioned to be included in the Super Series. It would not be wise to extrapolate any predictions about the Yucatan government's intentions toward the Caribbean League from this.) Being multinational, the Super Series is not restricted to Cuban players. Also, it is not subject to the restrictions of Neo-Communism, and individual players are allowed to earn additional income by giving endorsements to products and services and to sell personal memorabilia, such as autographed gear and images. Corporate advertising during the games is also permitted.

CARIBBEAN SS LEAGUE TEAMS

- Miami Marlins (CL)
- San Juan Tigers (CL)
- Havana Lions** (CL)
- Santiago de Cuba Wasps** (CL)
- Matanza Crocodiles** (CL)
- Guantanamo Indians** (CL)
- Cienfuegos Elephants** (CL)
- Mérida Yankees (YCT)*
- New Kingston Krakens (CL)
- Dominican Eagles (CL)

**Allowed to play only after the 2064 peace treaty made them automatous from Aztlan.*

*** Cuban All-Star teams*

URBAN SCRIMMAGE BASEBALL

Urban Scrimmage Baseball is not professional baseball. It's played specifically as an entertainment in Sports Town. Want to see ghouls play against corpses? How about an all-troll team vs. all dwarfs, or physical adepts against loa-possessed players? It's all politically incorrect, but very lucrative for the Cuban government.

the Martinez plan to make the most of the tourists' nuyen. Manufacturing plants in Guanabacoa produce boxes, bags, and other containers for Cuban exports.

- The president's playing a long game. He cleaned up the government-owned areas, created Zapatos Walk, and sold parts to Evo and Zoe. He's withholding renovations here until the neighborhood gets envious enough of everyone else prospering to toe the line on tourism. Nuyen is nuyen, no matter whose account it's from.
- Cosmo

PARQUE MARTÍ

Parque Marti has been called the bewitched town, a name it lives up to. Initially it looks like a small community from a century ago—a park bordered by four main streets. But the plain concrete walls of San Eugenio de la Palma Cathedral have been replaced with bas relief of the Grand Pantheon of Saints, and AR choirs and organs fill the park with welcoming sound. This is a center of Santeria worship, residence of the Royal Three and several revered Speakers for the spirit world. Awakened practitioners from throughout the Caribbean come here to study and be trained.

- The RoyalThree are the three highly initiated practitioners: the babalorichás, the iyalorichás, and the Obas (the father of orichá, the mother of orichá, and the leader of initiates). They are not royalty in blood, but are treated as such as the spirits chose them to speak on their behalf.
- Abracadavre

RITA VALDEZ

Metatype: Elf
Sex: Female
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 2
Type: Swag
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Personal Grooming (Fashion)
Personal Life: In a relationship
Description: Miss Rita is ostensibly the manager of Sedanita in Zapatos Walk. She also runs a few specialized clothing businesses in and around Havana. She designed the uniforms worn by Cuban law enforcement and the livery for several upscale hotels. If you're looking for clothing that will help you blend in to certain locations, Miss Rita is the person to see. There are surcharges for rush orders and work after regular business hours.

- Story time: So way back when Sugarcane was running the Mafia, he decided to take out the Royal Three—the three religious leaders of Santeria. Why is anyone's guess. He conscripted a small army, gave them guns, and sent them to Parque Martí. A little while later, the soldatos radioed the capo and reported that there was no town, just a whole lot of dirt. Capo came out, intending to come down hard on whoever was screwing around, but before he got there the soldatos started screaming. From where he was, all the capo could see was a huge cloud of dust. As nearly as anyone could figure out, Sugarcane's army was standing in the town, or rather on its underside. Then the earth "flipped over," revealing the town and burying his men. It wasn't a Ghost Dance, but damn that would have been intimidating.
- Kane

ZAPATOS WALK

For tourists, there is a shopping district called Zapatos Walk. It's a loop of neoclassical buildings restored to their original appearance, though there was some retrofitting. Several buildings that once stood shoulder to shoulder are now combined into a museum of the Cuban shoe industry. Visitors can observe fully operational manufacturing equipment from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cutting leather, stamping out soles, and assembling shoes. There are also several artisan cobblers who demonstrate making shoes by hand.

There are eight stores in Zapatos Walk that sell shoes, each targeting a slightly different market. The Imgelmo Store is connected to the museum. Customers can have handcrafted shoes made there by the artisans on site or shoes produced in the museum, though most of their inventory is manufactured in Havana by Ingelmo Footwear. Ingelmo is a Cuban family brand—Hector Ingelmo, a third-generation exile, has restored his grandfather's business and reputation as a designer. His success was funded by Zoé in exchange for their controlling interest in the company. Ingelmo Footwear offers Cuban-made shoes for every purpose made from exotic leathers, repurposed manmade materials used in combat aircraft, and everything in between. Limited production runs at the Havana plant ensures original Ingelmos remain exclusive status symbols. In partnership with the Cuban government, Zoé is looking into licensing Imgelmo's name and designs to other manufacturers worldwide (with strict quality standards and limits on production).

In addition to the museum and shoe stores, Zapatos Walk has several smaller shops specializing in clothes or accessories and a selection of cafes and restaurants.

- It's just a marketing campaign against Armanté, who supported Aztlan. Prior to the AZ-AM war, Zoé had no interest in Cuba. Since then, the Cuban government invited Zoé to Cuba. These days a tourist wearing Armanté would do well to stay inside the tourist resorts. Runners wearing Armanté to a meet with Mr. Johnson will be lucky if not getting the job is the only consequence.
- Cosmo

Sedanita, Shapiro, and Epstein are three stores in Zapatos Walk that also market locally manufactured shoes, but they cater to the middle class—less exotic materials and more reasonable prices. Though they each strive for their own unique take on Caribbean style, all three are owned by Common Denominator (Evo). Like Ingelmo, they limit production to boost exclusivity, though of course not to the degree Ingelmo does. Their products can also be found commanding premium prices in cities along the coast of the CAS. The other four shoe stores at Zapatos Walk are smaller, family-owned businesses that provide shoe repair, cleaning, and resale of other shoe brands.

- Note that Epstein and Shapiro are not your typical Cuban names. Cuba has always had a Jewish community, which has a small but significant impact on Cuban culture. It was in decline until President Martinez included it in his cultural revitalization project about a decade ago.
- Traveler Jones

SAN MIGUEL DEL PADRON

Middle-class and upper-working-class homes and apartment complexes are the first thing you see when you cross from the southeastern outskirts of Havana into the northern part of San Miguel Del Padron. Beyond them to the south are clusters of nicer homes—homes that look like they once belonged to the wealthy—surrounded by high walls and cleared land. Think defensible enclaves with clear fields of fire. South from there, the neighborhood goes rapidly to hell. Abandoned

PETER 'PADRE' VILLA

Metatype: Ork
Sex: Male
Age: Old
Connection Rating: 1
Type: Support
Preferred payment method: Cash (hard currency)
Hobbies/Vice: Personal Grooming (Fashion)
Personal Life: Widowed
Description: Peter knows shoes. He knows shoes very well. He's been shining shoes for over thirty years and has been a fixture at Zapatos Walk from the day it opened. He hears rumors and gossip all day—no one pays attention to the shoeshine ork—but gossip and rumors aren't his stock in trade. He can tell you the best shoes for any type of feet for any type of job, or identify almost any shoe from a partial footprint.

homes and buildings occupied by the *corea*, the homeless, who were driven out of Havana's more touristy and trendy neighborhoods as part of the "restoration and beautification" process. Here and there you'll find unregulated family markets, neighborhood talismongers of the Santeria tradition, and street entertainers playing to the locals for handouts. There is also the ubiquitous neighborhood baseball field, which doubles as a black market for Awakened and non-Awakened drugs between games.

- They aren't just refugees from the tourist zones. When Chinatown began to overflow, the Cuban police dumped the SINless out into San Miguel Del Padron. A lot of those abandoned buildings are being overgrown by jungle. The homeless are adapting—a lot of them camp along the Guachinango River, which is a reasonably safe source of water and fish.
- Darwin

GUACHINANGO BARRENS

An estimated 100,000 SINless live in the Guachinango barrens—stretching from the jungle-covered ruins down to the river. Both power and access to the grid are very limited, unstable, and frequently nonexistent. Groups of wooden huts fill the banks along the river. Some of the homeless have decided to shun city life—they've built scattered villages of wooden huts and are growing their own food. A lot more of them, however, have joined the Bone Gnawers.

- Rumor has it some kind of ritual magic is being used to speed up the overgrowth. The jungle has become so thick the Cuban Police don't bother trying to penetrate it to go after criminals.
- Abracadavre

- With one exception: They made a point of geeking those Bone Gnawers. Some of those guys didn't even leave the barrens before their execution.
- Thorn

FINCA VIGÍA

Finca Vigia is a Spanish colonial home just a bit south of Havana, most famous for being Ernest Hemingway's home until 1960. It was seized by Castro's government in 1961 and gradually stripped of his books, art, and manuscripts. No one lived there for any length of time after that, and it was allowed to deteriorate. In 2007 the home was restored to appear as it did when Hemingway had lived there to attract tourists, but it wasn't the money maker the hotels and casinos were, and the maintenance budget was cut. Three years later VITAS broke out, and over the next decade the neglected home fell to ruin. Inhabiting the site now is a spirit of man who calls itself Santiago. Santiago has become the caretaker of the half-collapsed building, collecting books and furniture that once belonged in the home. Every morning Santiago can be found at Finca Vigia feeding a family of cats.

- Santiago is an interesting character. He's also appeared near Hemingway's old Florida home, but seems to prefer Finca Vigia. It would be fun to find out his real name—and find out what it is he's really up to.
- Abracadavre

RUSSIAN EMBASSY

With all the media paying attention to the goings on around the corporate headquarters and the Caribbean League embassies in Old Havana, it's easy to forget the profound influence the Soviet Union was on Cuba—or that the embassy, now the Russian embassy, still exists. It is an ugly grey tower of mid-century Soviet design jutting up from the surrounding sprawl like a discarded sword. Russia maintains a skeleton ambassadorial staff, with minimal support staff and only a token military presence. The statues, the paintings, and most of the useful technology were stripped out long ago, but it is still a thoroughly credentialed embassy. Mr Strynsky is the current ambassador. He quietly maintains diplomatic communication channels open and administers Russia's support of the current Cuban government.

- Yeah, you don't really hear much about Russia. They don't appear interested in the Caribbean League or much of anything else outside of Cuba. Rumor has it the Russian

government is hoping to recoup monies invested in the previous government, but there's nothing to indicate how they intend to do that. Mostly the Russians just sit in their tower drinking tea.

- Thorn

- You're overlooking what most people overlook. There are Vory living in the embassy tower who have diplomatic credentials and full diplomatic immunity.
- Plan 9

SANTIAGO

Metatype: Free Spirit
Sex: Unknown
Age: Unknown
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Support, Legwork
Preferred payment method: Barter (hobby/vice items)
Hobbies/Vice: Hemingway memorabilia
Personal Life: Unknown

Description: Not much is known about Santiago, other than he appears as a weathered old giant when materialized. His eyes are the color of the ocean depths, his beard shaped like a cresting wave, and his skin—as finely scaled as an eel's—is mottled slate grey and kelp brown. He tells many stories, some are about astral places, others are historical, some seem to be fables, and others prophecies. It's hard to know what's true or significant.

CAPO MAXIMO "MACHETE" GOMEZ

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 4
Type: Networking, Legwork
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Gambling (Casinos)
Personal Life: Single

Description: Capo Maximo, a.k.a. Machete, was in charge of the San Miguel Del Patron neighborhood. He earned his nickname by dismembering a wealthy family that refused to pay a debt to the Batista for products and services rendered. Other than the social status of the victims, this wasn't a particularly shocking crime by Carib League standards, but the bloody aftermath was in full view for tourists. President Martinez declared those responsible would be swiftly caught and executed. Within hours Maximo was brutally beaten by several assailants, losing an ear, an eye, and the respect of the gangs in the Patron. Evidence was discovered proving four members of the Bone Gnawer gang had killed the family and President Martinez ordered them executed. Maximo still runs the Batista protection racket, but he has never embarrassed Cuba in front of tourists again and he no longer oversees the gangs and black market in Patron. He can be found watching games at the baseball field. He is routinely snubbed by the gangs.

JERICH STRYNSKY

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Shadow Services
Preferred payment method: Service (drek jobs)
Hobbies/Vice: Botany
Personal Life: Divorced

Description: Jerich is a tall, thin man with a talent for details. He is also fond of gardening and can be found on the grounds of the Russian Embassy, where he lives and works, tending herbs and flowers. His job at the Embassy is processing the paperwork for permits, licensing, or any other interaction the Russian government might have with Cuba. He is also provides the Vory with permits, licensing, and fake SINs. If you have enough money, he can provide authentic documents for temporary "diplomatic immunity."

BONE GNAWERS

Group Connection: 1 (5 Karma)

The Bone Gnawers is a gang of 300+ squatters united in survival. Small bands roam the back streets of downtown, stealing food and dumpster diving. They have some talent in B&E, but the mob dash is their favorite organized tactic. A group of fifty or more Bone Gnawers will hit open-air restaurants and outdoor parties, snagging food, drink, and anything they think might be useful.

LOS GUERREROS

Group Connection: 1 (5 Karma)

Los Guerreros are a religious gang of "holy warriors" who rely on magical help. Some are adepts, some are possessed by spirits, and others are just crazy. They control a black market of awakened drugs, cheap to manufacture drugs, and Santeria and Vodoun reagents.

OCTOBER TENTH

Named after the date of independence of Cuba, October Tenth is an older neighborhood with Spanish colonial architecture dating from the 17th century. The crumbling stone buildings both add charm and remind residents their neighborhood is being allowed to sink into ruin. Located to the south of Revolution Square, October Tenth is home to many low- and middle- class Cubans—a working neighborhood that does not fit the image of Cuba being marketed to tourists. That doesn't mean the community is dead or dying. Cozy bistros, Christian churches, medical centers, baseball fields, local bars, and family tiendas dot the neighborhood.

CERRO

This neighborhood of renovated neoclassical mansions is home to the upper class. These renovations included decorative walls to spare wealthy eyes the view of unsightly homes to the south. The police did their part to protect the rich by forcibly relocating the homeless and squatters to the Guachinango barrens. The main attraction to Cerro is the Latin American Stadium, home of the Super Series.

LATIN AMERICAN STADIUM

This is the largest stadium in Cuba, hosting many of the Super Series games. Remolded in 2025, the stadium

can hold 70,000 people. The surrounding parking lot has been modified to house food carts and markets where the teams can sell memorabilia. While tailgate parties are a North American concept, banquet tables and AR grids are available for the lower class who can't afford tickets but still want to be close to the action.

- Bats, balls, uniforms, holocards, and signature foodstuffs can be bought from Havana Lions or any of the Super Series teams playing.
- Traveler Jones

MARIANAO

The Mariano neighborhood, built on former farmland, has turned back to farming. The years of drought and polluted rains destroyed Cuba's agriculture industry; what little remained could not produce enough for the people. The Cuban government responded by producing thousands of twelve-meter-dome greenhouses, which they sold at cost to anyone who was willing to farm on a micro scale. The residents of Mariano embraced the initiative wholeheartedly. Several hundred brightly painted hexagonal domes and solar arrays fill yards and common spaces, each growing soy, sugarcane, vegetables, and even tobacco. Mariano is doing its part to keep the Caribbean League independent.

- While the Government and a few entrepreneurs grew the essential agricultural crops, the Mafia have recruited a select few to grow drugs.
- Coral Reefer

- The domed greenhouses are sorely out of date. Like thirty years out of date. The government has been purchasing new ones from Wind River Corporation (WRC) and has a contract with Sustainable Soil Technologies, a subsidiary of WRC, to educate government farmers on the latest technology.
- Ecotope

THE ORIENTAL

Not much was left of the Oriental racetrack except for the gravel and asphalt remains of the loop. A wealthy Cuban bought up the property and turned it into a classy nightclub. Holographic horses from old films and artistic horse-like drones run the course around an outdoor dining area. The risers where racing fans once cheered are now multiple tiered bars with live bands.

- One of the few places publicly known to be owned by Raul Batista.
- The Chromed Accountant

CAPO CARLOS 'LUCKY' GONZALO

Metatype: Ork
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 5
Type: Swag
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Bad Habit (Illegal drug)
Personal Life: None of your damn business (very private)
Description: Capo Gonzalo is the face/manager for the Oriental, making sure that his guests are happy and entertained. For those tourists looking for something extra, he keeps the bliss and novacoke flowing for the Batista. While he has paid Cuban law enforcement for the "permits" to grow some of the drugs, he produces more than authorized to maximize profits for the Batista. He maintains a continuous shell game in motion, using the Tropicana Club gardens and several greenhouses to keep the inspectors from ever getting an accurate count.

PETER 'RICKY RICARDO' RICHARDS

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 2
Type: support
Preferred payment method: Service (drek jobs)
Hobbies/Vice: Family obligations
Personal Life: Married
Description: Just as tourists expect to see Elvis in Vegas, they expect to find Ricky Ricardo playing at the Tropicana. Peter is the current singer/musician/actor playing Ricky for the customers, and he has parlayed his magically enhanced talents into a successful and lucrative career. The tourists love his flawless impersonation and the warmly comedic skits he does with the holographic projection of his wife Lucy. Lucy really is his wife. She runs the entertainment technology board backstage, including puppeting the holographic Lucy onstage.

TROPICANA CLUB

Dante's Inferno, the Big Rhino, Club Penumbra; none of them compare to the world-renowned Tropicana Club. The Tropicana Club has spread Latin music and Cuban style to all corners of the globe. At its heart is an outdoor cabaret under a jungle canopy—a dramatic contrast to the wild urban environment of Revolution Square—surrounded by six acres of beautifully main-

tained gardens. Concealed by the garden's foliage but within easy strolling distance of the cabaret are two casinos and a few more intimate bars and taverns. A faithfully reproduced virtual version of the Tropicana's show is available twenty-four hours a day. One of the show's biggest attractions is the host and star of the revue, Ricky Ricardo, playing Latin music and recreating skits from the legendary *I Love Lucy* flatscreen show.

- No one really pays attention to the garden, other than noting it has beautiful flowers. Black mana and crimson orchids are scattered throughout. It takes a botanist to see it's a buffet of Awakened and non-Awakened drugs.
- Coral Reefer

- Oddly enough, the Military Technical School is just a stone's throw away from the Tropicana Club.
- Slamm-0!

- Not that odd of you think about it. How do you think the president trains his intelligence officers?
- Plan 9

ARROYO NARANJO-BOYEROS

A million tourists a year get shuttled past the Arroyo Naranjo and Boyeros neighborhoods on the express railway that links Lady Guadalupe International Airport to Havana and the resorts without noticing them. Even the cheap ones taking the buses along the highway don't really notice them. Which is fine with the locals. All the young ones and the ambitious ones go to Havana, and the few who remain in the semi-abandoned area are content to live undisturbed lives. Looking like ruins overgrown by jungle helps. When the wards faded, the National Zoological Park, Lenin Park, and the Botanical Gardens grew toward each other. They've merged into a few hundred square kilometers of remarkable biodiversity. The Paso Sequito reservoir is rumored to be particularly interesting. The few remaining metahuman residents have adopted a more rural lifestyle, getting much of what they need from the forest and jungle; some have gone completely native.

- The Taino tribes have been moving out here for years. There are now about five hundred natives in small villages in and around the park. Tough bastards; when the voodoo gangs tried to shake them down with fear and intimidation, the gang soldiers were eaten by the trees.
- Darwin

Between the airport, which is itself nearly surrounded, and the southwest limits of Havana, there are only two areas that have not been over grown: ExpoCuba and the Friendship Garden.

EXPOCUBA

ExpoCuba is a self-congratulatory trade fair and museum promoting famous Cubans from sports to music to science. Enrique Martinez attempted to revitalize the center by expanding the place to fifty pavilions and leasing locations to the rest of the Caribbean League. There was a few takers from Haiti, but none of the other members were interested in promoting ExpoCuba.

Today it's lightly populated with a few abandoned shops filled with junk that even tourists didn't want.

- It was like this before Pretty Boy Martinez. He just made it gaudier.
- Traveler Jones

- There's only the light rail that connects it to the city, so unless Ray Martinez wants to move the freeway, it's not going to have much success.
- Darwin

LADY GUADALUPE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Lady Guadalupe International Airport is located fifteen kilometers southwest of Havana and is connected to the city by a highway and a rail line. The wild growth of plants from the Botanical Gardens press against its fences but so far have not damaged the runways. The airport was expanded by the Neo-Communists, who realized international trade would strengthen the country economically and politically by establishing new connections. They also lifted the restriction that only airlines at least partially owned by Cuba could use the airport; while Atzlan and Aztechnology are still banned, other corporations and nations are welcome. Now tourists can fly nonstop suborbitals and jumbos directly to Havana where they can connect to island-hopping flights, local cruises, or resorts. Two modern terminals were built to handle the increased traffic.

- Not to mention neither AeroCaribbean nor CubanTaxi could afford a suborbital to keep up with the corporate airlines
- Darwin

A million tourists pass through Lady Guadalupe International Airport every year, as well as hundreds of thousands of local and Caribbean League passengers. The first of the airport's six terminals is dedicated to domestic travel throughout the League. Terminal two was the Canadian terminal, given special authority by Fidel Castro over a century ago. When Canada divided, Quebec won the terminal contract and maintains a steady schedule of dedicated flights. Terminals three through five are shared by various corporate international carriers. These newest terminals, built specifically for the tourist industry, are al-

ready crowded and overworked, which makes a poor first impression on tourists. Whether they will be expanded, a new terminal built, or a reallocation of existing terminal space made is hotly debated. Terminal six is dedicated to Caribbean International flights from Miami and Cuba's own AeroCaribbean airline.

Customs strictly limits what can be taken out of the country. Most tourists care only about the two-bottle limit on rum and the dozen cigars. However, customs agents are serious about precious metals and stones; works of art; any items of historic, anthropological, or cultural value; books printed before 1940; medicine; and firearms or ammunition. As for magical paraphernalia, forget about getting off with a fee—trying to smuggle written spells, zombie powder, reagents, or anything else will earn you jail time.

THE BOYEROS NATIONAL PARK

What is now considered the Boyeros National Park is an irregular area of wilderness covering just over twenty-seven square kilometers that lie between the international airport and Havana. Its eastern border touches on Embalse Ejército Rebelde—Army of the Rebellion Reservoir, the primary source of fresh water for the southern portion of Havana. At its heart is a crescent formed by what were three national parks: the Parque Zoololgico Nacional, the Parque Lenin, and the Jardin Botánico Nacional. All three parks had fallen into disrepair—inadequately maintained by volunteers making do as best they could—when the plagues and chaos descended on Cuba. What few people remained fled as animals and plants Awakened. When the parks began to spread, an attempt was made to keep them from overgrowing the surrounding towns and communities through ritual magic. What little success these measures had was completely lost when a "Gaia phenomenon" triggered explosive growth and the jungle quickly overpowered all physical and magical restraints. There is now a series of walls in various materials surrounding Boyeros National Park, but these serve mostly to mark where the park chose to stop advancing rather than contain the plants. The highway and rail lines connect-

ing the airport to Havana are lined with fences—hidden from tourists by AR adverts—that prevent most animals from attempting to hitch rides.

The National Zoo was divided into the African Plain, where tourists in vehicles could watch animals roaming free; the Lion Pit, where tourists on walkways could look down on prides of lions in large enclosures; and Noah's Ark, a more traditional zoo with smaller enclosures for the animals and restaurants and shops for the tourists. Though animals from Africa predominated, the park had specimens from all over the world.

Lenin Park had been a combination amusement park, celebration of the Revolution, and family park with trails, picnic areas, a large lake (Embalse Paso Sequito); bikes, horses, and boats could be rented, and there was a pavilion of restaurants for those who preferred picnics with air conditioning. Though the rollercoaster, steam train, and other rides were dismantled by scavengers for their metal, many of the stone monuments remain—including a ten-meter-tall bust of Lenin that can be seen peering out from among the trees.

The Botanical Gardens once included several extensive greenhouses where plants from all over the world—many of which, such as desert cactus or tundra lichen, would not have survived in the Caribbean climate—were cultivated and displayed. Traditional gardens, showcasing cultural horticulture from all over the world, were also recreated.

All of the animals from the zoo now roam free in Boyeros, and there are reports of viable herds of rhinos and several other rare and protected species flourishing. The lakes and waterways team with non-indigenous fish evidently released from the aquariums, but the large and varied population of crocodiles can make fishing problematic. Many of the exotic and delicate plants from the botanical garden succumbed to disease and acid rain, but just as many survived and even thrived, making the jungles, woods, and meadows of Boyeros some of the most biologically diverse in the world.

Self-sufficient communities of the indigenous Taino people have established themselves in Boyeros National Park, as their traditional methods of hunting and farming are evidently well suited to taking advantage of what the wilderness has to offer.

- Speaking of the Taino tribe, with the exception of the freeway, the government has put the burden of keeping poachers and talismongers from spoiling the park squarely on the tribe.
- Darwin

CARIBBEAN LEAGUE FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

Located in the last conveniently accessible portion of the National Botanical Garden, the Caribbean League Friendship Garden was the brainchild of Lady Guadalupe Martinez. She proposed a community of greenhouses for growing the rarer and more fragile plants that grew throughout the Caribbean basin be created as a symbolic representation of the Caribbean League. Designing and building the Friendship Garden was a joint effort involving representatives of every nation and ethnic group in the Caribbean. It was difficult getting everyone to cooperate, but every step of the process required full participation by all of the member states. Because unique variations of these plants had evolved on each island, greenhouses that exactly duplicated their ecology were created—forty-five in all. Ironing out the problems of design and criteria for selecting plants—not to mention overseeing the importation and cultivation of every plant—gave the member nations a chance to practice cooperation and see the advantages of that cooperation in a nonthreatening manner. This experience gave everyone involved an understanding of the skills necessary to carry their unified league forward. Each of the fifteen-meter-domes uses AR effects to present each plant in its "native" environment.

- While the garden is not as popular to the tourists, occasional groups come and see the plants. Several botanists from the league maintain the gardens and use it to reseed their own nations.
- Ecotope

- Some nations are real serious when it comes protecting their territory. Who knew things could be heated at the council when some Dominican Republic fruit bats found their way to the Haitian dome and ate the fruit of the rare Manilkara tree?
- Darwin

- Because the garden was Lady Guadalupe's favorite, it has been a mission of the president to keep the garden thriving. It also has political meaning of unity between the nations.
- Ecotope

RINCON

In Rincon, there is a Catholic sanctuary to St. Lazarus. Fifteen thousand faithful make the pilgrimage to the site—often barefooted, or on their knees, or carrying heavy objects as a symbols or their devotion and faith in miracles. This ritual of self-sacrifice has created a manaline from the town of Santiago de las Vegas to the sanctuary. Because of the unorthodox and inclusive mix of religious worship, the path is aligned to all tradi-

tions. Those Awakened who practice this ritual migration can find that the path transforms the objects they carry for the ritual into reagents—in rare cases refined reagents—at the end of their journey.

- As the saying goes "old Lazarus collects his due", so I'd be careful what is done with such gifts.
- Abracadavre

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

GUANTÁNAMO BAY

Guantánamo Bay is located at the southeastern side of Cuba and is the largest harbor on the south side. Since the communist revolution, mines and a field of cactus were added to the Cuban side of the border between the UCAS and Cuba. The United States had long since removed any landmines on their side, replacing them with motion and sound sensors. When they took over, Ares used their heavy manufacturing capabilities to reinforce the observation towers. Neither Enrique nor Ray have removed the mines and cactus as of yet, but negotiations have warmed up since the contract with Knight Errant.

- With the Free Marine Corps temporarily stationed in Mariel Bay and their success against Atzlan, Ray Martinez has been petitioning for a permanent base for the FMC in Cuba at Guantanamo. He's even been suggesting an expansion of the base or reduction in rent.
- BTL Bailey

- Ray doesn't trust the corporation, especially since he didn't bring them here. He figures that having the FMC around would help with new negotiations with the UCAS.
- Cosmo

GUANTÁNAMO BAY NAVAL BASE

This naval base covers forty-five square miles of water and land at Guantánamo Bay. The naval base has existed here since 1903 and was owned by the United States until the formation of the UCAS. Since 2050, the Naval Base has been subleased to Ares. The base is self-sustaining and remains independent from the Cuban government. Water comes from offshore desalination plants, power from wind and solar generators, and there are several large LNG and fuel tanks to keep things running in the event of an emergency.

CAGUAX III

Metatype: Elf
Sex: Male
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Support
Preferred payment method: Barter (easy-to-sell items)
Hobbies/Vice: Family obligations
Personal Life: In a relationship
Description: Caguax III is the young chief of the Taino tribe of about three hundred members living in the Boyeros National Park. Caguax and his people are not illiterate or ignorant of technology as many tourists believe. They have simply made the choice to live simply, away from the city lights and urban lifestyle. Reality being what it is, Caguax and his tribe have had to make some exceptions to that rule in order to protect themselves and their way of life.

CACICA

Metatype: Human
Sex: Female
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 2
Type: Networking
Preferred payment method: Barter (easy-to-sell items)
Hobbies/Vice: Nothing of interest or of use
Personal Life: Single
Description: Cacia is unique among the Taino people. She can hear the Matrix. Caguax has called her their bohique and watcher over this other world, likethe shamans do with spirits. Cacica is one of Caguax's exceptions to the technology ban, for among other things she can disable monitoring equipment and warn when vehicles or drones are approaching.

ADELINE

Metatype: Human
Sex: Female
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 3
Type: Shadow Services
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Vehicles (Planes)
Personal Life: In a relationship
Description: Adeline runs a charter flight service called the Nightjar Tours, for tourists wanting a more individualized tour of the Caribbean islands. She has a quaint island hopper, suitable for small islands off the beaten path, and a sleek seaplane able to pick up or drop off tourists in secluded lagoons, broader rivers, or the open sea. Her life partner Donna is competent with all forms of weapons and provides security—just in case they encounter pirates who don't know the golden rule of tourism.

- Up until the 1959 communist revolution, Cuba was cashing in the rent money. Between then and 2014, no US check was cashed. Between 2014 and 2020, a few checks were cashed to keep Cuba from going under. But once the UCAS was formed, it became pretty much lost revenue, as no one was going to recognize a turn-of-the-century check from a government and nation that doesn't exist anymore.
- The Chromed Accountant

The base is divided into three main geographical sections: Leeward Point, Windward Point, and Guantánamo Bay. Leeward Point is the active military airfield. Windward Point is the active naval station with dozens of coves and peninsulas to anchor ships. The bulk of the military personnel live and work in the Bay section, which is far more inland, and includes the hospital, stores, maintenance shops, and administrative and recreational facilities as well as the residences.

- Remember that Cuba deepened and reshaped parts of Mariel Bay to accommodate triple-E-class cargo ships? Well, Ares did something similar with Guantánamo Bay. There are smaller cargo ships going out off to the Guiana Basin.
- Swash and Buckle

MARIEL

The town of Mariel sits forty kilometers west of Havana on Mariel Bay and is home to an old submarine base and an aging power plant. Since the late 2020s, the Neo-Communist government has been trying to turn Mariel into an economic hub of Cuba and opening it up as a special trade zone to League investors and independent businesses. Cuba has been making extensive changes to Mariel Bay in an effort to make it hospitable to cargo ships of triple-E class and potentially larger designs. These ships have been working throughout Europe and Asia for years, and the Carib League wants to be one of the first nations in the Americas to have a port that can accommodate them—and the only one in the Caribbean. Cuba's twenty-five-year, multi-billion-nuyen plan is to build the Bay region up into a commercial trading center able to meet all of the League's needs. Mariel is not a tourist destination.

With almost a million cargo containers routinely warehoused in Mariel, it is already one of the top trade ports in the Caribbean League. The city of Mariel has expanded into a colorful and multinational port with a vibrant business district expanding to support the influx of commerce.

- Many of the smaller islands of the league have benefited with extraterritorial space on Mariel Bay to construct facilities or import goods that wouldn't be possible in their own territory.
- BTL Bailey

- Said the spider to the fly. While Enrique's words were like honey, it's actions like this that lure them in.
- Pyramid Watcher

With the Free Marine Corps base being heavily damaged in Borinquen, Ray Martinez offered them free use of the facilities of the Mariel Bay in return for support and training of the Caribbean Navy. The FMC accepted the invitation, and currently the *Iwo Jima* is berthed there.

- Seeing the *Iwo Jima* parked in Mariel Bay, the Caribbean Navy in Havana, and Ares Navy at GTMO is enough to make any nation or league member take notice. President Ray is using that image to levy political favors.
- Swash and Buckle

PATRIA O MUERTE (HOMELAND OR DEATH)

This is one of a dozen independently owned pool halls and casinos at Mariel. Run by Mr. Pejuero, the Patria houses twenty old-fashioned pool tables and three gyroscopic drone pool games, and it is very popular with citizens from distant islands of the Caribbean League who have come to work at Mariel. The Patria is marketed by the government as a Neo-Communist movement success story.

- Truth be told. Mr. Pejuero's is a government-owned casino, until he can pay off the loans and licensing permits. Until then, it's his place, but staffed with government-chosen employees.
- The Chromed Accountant

ISLE OF YOUTH (TREASURE ISLAND)

Robert Louis Stevenson chose the Isla de Pinos as the setting for his romantic pirate novel *Treasure Island*. Though the Isle of Pines was officially renamed Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) a century ago, only sticklers call Cuba's second largest island anything but Treasure Island. United Oil leased the rights to the island back in 2016 in exchange for financial and technical support. During the four years of occupation, they rebuilt the cellblocks of the Presidio Modelo into habitable coffin cubes for the thousands of workers they employed to strip the island of wood and construct offshore oil and gas platforms in the surrounding wa-

ters. When NatVat was taken over by ORO in 2021, Treasure Island and United Oil became the targets of pirate raids. Unable to protect their platforms, United Oil terminated its contract and abandoned the island. Pirates took over the modernized Presidio Modelo compound and turned it into a fortress they called the Black Diamond.

There are no youth to the Island of Youth today. The vast forests of pine trees are gone, and the hills have been strip-mined for marble and minerals. Alternating storms and drought have made recovery even more difficult. There have been a few attempts to farm tobacco or sugar cane to supply the "unofficial" trade in Cuban cigars and rum, but these efforts have met with little success.

- Inside Scoop: Ray Martinez is looking to Wind River Corporation to revitalize the whole island for agriculture. This will be interesting in how the president deals with Gingersnap.
- The Chromed Accountant

BLACK DIAMOND

The Black Diamond is the seat of the Pirate King, two kilometers from the sea in the northeast corner of Treasure Island. Originally a prison, Presidio Modelo, built in the 1920s, it's composed of a massive central building framed by the four circular, panopticon cell blocks. Presidio Modelo has a long history as a dumping ground for political dissidents, revolutionaries, counter-revolutionaries, homosexuals, and other "criminals of convenience"—including Fidel Castro and his brother Raul. The Black Diamond is not as isolated as it looks. Legend has it Pie de Palo dug the first tunnel on Treasure Island to hide part of his plunder from Santiago de Cuba; other pirates followed his example, and over the course of a few centuries the network grew to connect caves throughout the island. Thanks to modifications and upgrades by The Gingerbread Man, it's now possible to get almost anywhere on the island undetected. Other subterranean features include old soviet bunkers and literally underground places of worship for persecuted religions. The current Pirate King is Gingersnap, daughter and heir of The Gingerbread Man. "Gingersnap" is an overly obvious name, I know, but "That Red-Headed Bitch" never really caught on.

NUEVA GERONA

The town is nothing more than a tropical version of the barrens. It's been burned and raided so often by competing pirates and a few deniable corporate assets that there are few recognizable ruins, much less intact structures. The sprawling chaos of tents, lean-tos and sheds is home to an estimated fifteen thousand metahumans attempting to escape whatever's chasing them. A river of sorts connects Nueva Gerona to the sea, allowing those lucky enough to own makeshift skiffs or dugout canoes to fish and maybe trade. The ruined remains of the airport are controlled by the De Mon crew. The nearest law (using the term loosely) is the Black Diamond, so disputes tend to end quickly and violently.

GINGERSNAP

Metatype: Human
Sex: Female
Age: Young
Connection Rating: 8
Type: Swag or Shadow Services
Preferred payment method: Barter
Hobbies/Vice: Weapons (Military)
Personal Life: Single
Description: Gingersnap came into her own roughly three years ago, after Kane killed her father, Gingerbread Man, over North Africa. With her wild red hair and surly attitude, no one doubts that she's her father's daughter. Her birth mother, Miss Muffet, had cyber-induced emotional issues, and Gingersnap was raised by Nix Naught. Gingersnap commands the pirates based at Black Diamond and can provide a ship and crew for a variety of services, but only if she likes the gifts she receives in exchange.

- That reminds me: Ran, ran, as fast as he can, I did catch him, that Gingerbread Man! I was surprised that he stayed in the piracy business after the tempo affair. Shame that he dumped Muffet for Nix Naught, that Sukuyan witch. I think that the breakup between Muffet and GB was the beginning of the end of the Gingerbread gang.
- Kane

- What happened to Miss Muffet?
- Kat o' Nine Tales

- She moved on with her life. Cap'n would be better at explaining this, but with that much cyber, she just wasn't the parenting type.
- Kane

- I heard that Gingersnap has been plotting to avenge her father. You worried Kane?
- Swash and Buckle

- Wait, I thought De Mon had a Sukuyan bride?
- SEATAC Sweetie

- You guys need to scan the shadow grid more. That was Maya, his girlfriend from Trinidad. He had commitment issues, jealousy problems, whatever. These days he looks like old shit, and she still looks like she's in her 20s. Since they split he's been working piracy north of the island, and she's been working it south.
- Auntie Social

- And to answer your question, Swash, doing what I do, do you really think I worry about every consequence?
- Kane

- A letter of marque has been traded to Ginger for salvaged heavy weapons and artillery, now patched into the Black Diamond defenses. A mixed arsenal left over from the Az-Am war and Desert Wars.
- Cosmo

VARADERO

Sprawling across twenty kilometers of the Hicacos Peninsula, one hundred and forty kilometers east of Havana, is Varadero, the second-largest resort in the Caribbean. Varadero has grown up from the small resort Al Capone loved to become a two-kilometer-wide strip of seventy towering hotels and casinos—including the failed Jintero super structure. The type of tourist to whom Varadero caters does not care that the modern buildings keep the narrow beach in shadow much of the day. The massive resort is Cuban in GPS coordinates only. The clean, modern, and inoffensive architecture can be found in any pricey resort anywhere in the world. The menus are replete with familiar dishes similar to those found in four-star chain restaurants around the globe. The Varadero serves tourist who want to have been somewhere, but don't really want to leave the comforts of home—some two million of them a year. Those brave few who want to risk experiencing something really Caribbean can take the tour buses or train to Havana.

ORGANIZED CRIME

BATISTA

There's only one consistent organized crime group in Cuba, the Mafia. And the only great mafia organization in Cuba is the Batista. The Batista have a long family history in Cuba, dating back to before Fulgencio "El Hombre" Batista became president, then dictator of Cuba, well before the Awakening. The architect and leader of the Batista return to Cuba was Garcia Batista. Now, through their working relationship with the Gambione family, the Batista have grown beyond the island to become the largest criminal organization in the Caribbean League.

- Now some things make sense with how the family operates.
- Coral Reefer

DON GARCIA BATISTA (1987-2043)

An intellectual game popular among, well, intellectuals, is to speculate about how different Cuba's recent history would be if Raul Castro hadn't passed away from VITAS in 2010. What might have happened if Fidel had been able to turn the reins of power over to his strong and soft-spoken brother when his health forced him to step down in 2014? We'll never know. What we do know is that Fidel Castro left the government in the hands of Jose Torrado, his First Secretary of the Central Committee. A lifelong bureaucrat and competent administrator, Torrado was by no means the leader of a nation. Paralyzed by responsibility, incapable of coping with people who did not simply do as he said, unable to resolve conflicts without a higher authority to whom he could defer, Torrado lasted six months before panicking and declaring martial law. He realized that was a mistake fairly quickly. A week later he was gone, fleeing the country with whatever he could carry in a suitcase.

Garcia Batista, living in Spain, had not predicted this precise chain of events, but he had seen Fidel Castro's failing health and knew the government would be weak and unstable without him in command. He entered into agreements with some families in America and very quietly began building a small army of soldatos in Cuba in preparation for his return. In the wake of the Chaos, Garcia Batista flew in from Spain. He mobilized his army—establishing that he was a force to be reckoned with—and began establishing or reestablishing ties with local criminals and groups. He also invested heavily in buying up the sugarcane refineries.

It was not an easy process. There was no control for the first few years. Cash was needed to pay the soldiers necessary to maintain martial law. Magic was still fairly new, and Garcia had no experience in fighting loa-mounted servitors while a houngan dropped balls of fire and lightning from a distance. When magical attacks nearly killed him on the streets of Camaguey, Garcia knew he had to adapt or die. In early 2015 he paid to have the eleven most powerful magicians he could find released from the States and Cuba, then offered them the chance to work for him. His new magic enforcers evened the odds, and his campaign to win control Cuba was soon back on track. His example of planning ahead, adapting quickly to change, and acting decisively established the modus operandi the Batista family has tried to follow ever since. In 2040 Garcia "retired," turning day-to-day running of family over to his nephew Raul, so he could enjoy the fruits of his success. His retirement was short-lived, as he was assassinated in 2043.

DON RAUL 'SUGARCANE' BATISTA (2004–2061)

Raul followed his uncle's example of planning ten years in the future. He foresaw that magic wasn't going away

and that religion and magic had become closely entwined. He negotiated an alliance with the strongest vodoun gangs and brought them into the Family. It was a costly trade that required adjustments in leadership but proved worth it in the long run. Much of the population who believed in vodou and feared it came to fear and respect the Family. Sugarcane foresaw the buildup of Havana as a great tourist port, so he competed with Lady Martinez to gain control over parts of Havana Bay. While Sugarcane was the first to offer loans for Awakened to purchase magic supplies and the first of the Mafia to use and move preparations and reagents, he didn't understand magic beyond the physical accouterments. Spirits were always a mystery to him. Thus he did not foresee that ordering an act of sabotage that dumped a huge volume of burning diesel into the bay would have adverse magical effects. In 2061, what is believed to have been a toxic spirit of the bay pulled Sugarcane from his swimming pool into the sewers.

- He could not have foreseen nor understood the importance of the location to the spirit world.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- He could have. But he was blinded by multiple kinds of smoke and mists.
- Arete

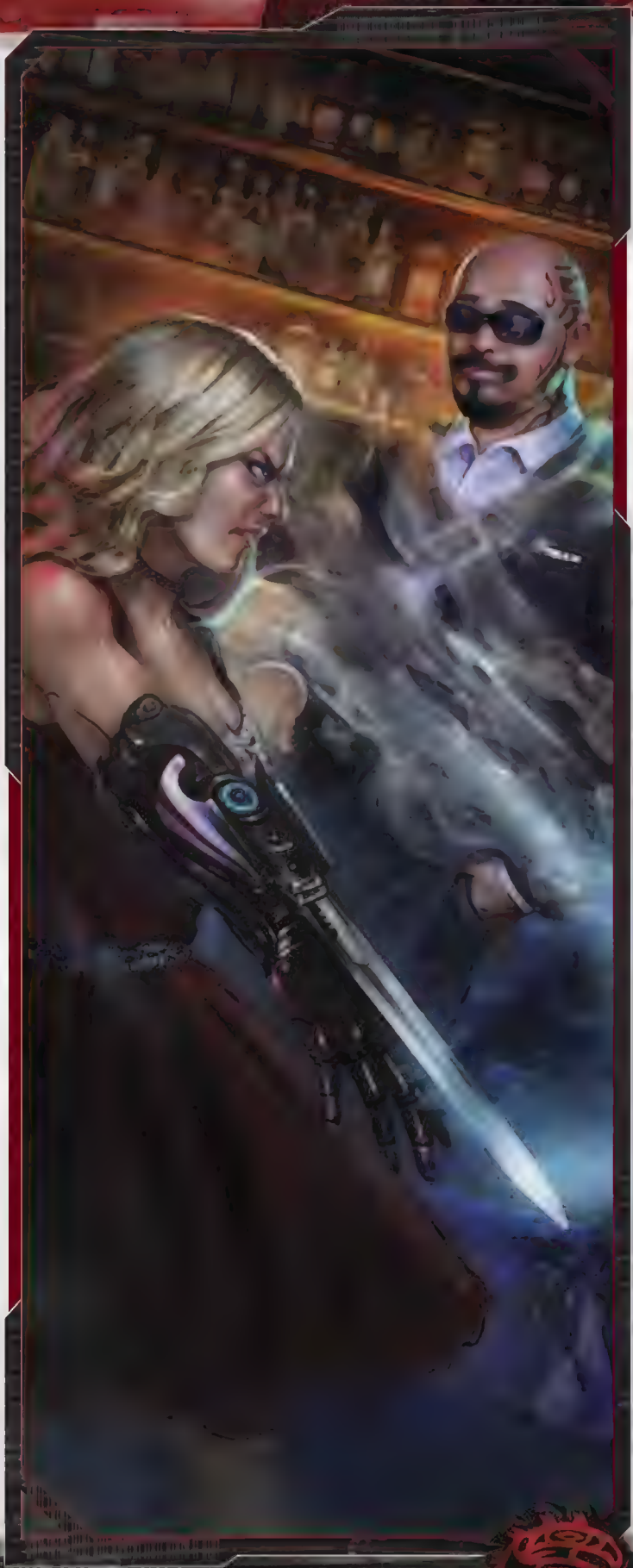
- Damn, I love it when those two get together.
- Cosmo

DON MIGUEL "SMOKE" BATISTA (2028–)

Raul's successor was his son Miguel. Miguel learned the Batista philosophy from his father and great uncle and continues to play for long-term benefits. He worked with Pretty Boy instead of against him in his vision of the future of Cuba, for example. This allowed him to influence the government and gain "licensing" for his illegal activities. He also saw the return of gambling to Cuba and bought "Office Buildings" and built hotels. He even foresaw the rise of Ray Martinez and what could be called conscription of pirates under the Cuban flag.

- This can be a challenge to understand, but to put it simply, everyone wants a cut of the profits. From the government "license" to the weekly bribes and a split of the money going to the current big fish keeping you from becoming chum.
- The Chromed Accountant

- While the old men play chess, the young play first-person shooters. Many of the capos and soldatos are young and expect instant gratification, while the Don plays a slower



DON MIGUEL 'SMOKE' BATISTA

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 10
Type: Personal Favor, Networking, Legwork
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Nothing of interest or of use
Personal Life: None of your damn business (very private)
Description: Miguel Batista earned his nickname by never being where attackers thought he was. There's a rumor, almost a legend, that Don Miguel can magically create a doppelgänger of smoke to lead his enemies astray. So far no enemy who's gotten close enough to get a definitive answer has lived long enough to confirm or deny this hypothesis. Don Miguel Batista controls the Mafia in Cuba and has influence throughout the Caribbean League.

CAPO JUAN-JUAN VASQUEZ

Metatype: Elf
Sex: Male
Age: Old
Connection Rating: 6
Type: Networking, Legwork
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Smoking)
Personal Life: Divorced
Description: Juan-Juan Vasquez is an artist with the Matrix and data manipulation. He's been around long enough to forget more tricks than most script kiddies ever learn. He launders all of the family's money through hundreds of legit businesses—businesses that have gone defunct in the real world but are kept somewhat alive by online sales. He also helps distribute and deliver (or obscure) paydata packets and BTLs. Sugarcane called him the capo of the Matrix, but none of the other capos are comfortable relying solely on him for Matrix work and have each quietly acquired their own team of hackers.

game. Security expects bribes as a waitress expects tips. The capos don't understand how increased money given to a project twenty years down the road will benefit them more than spending the money now.

- Kane

- Ray Martinez sees this and funnels money and influence toward the Mafia to keep Miguel busy with his own house. Of course here's the rub: if Miguel saw Ray gaining power, then who is working the longer solution?
- Darwin

Since Raul Batista became Don, there have been fifteen Capos running each of the neighborhoods in Havana, while two more administer Matrix and Astral space. They have been given fairly free rein, within broad limits, by Raul, provided they bring in profit and ensure that the Batista family is still respected and feared by the people of Cuba.

- There's a caveat to this, and this is what many don't get: Raul doesn't care for the short-term losses so long as he wins the war. Look at Machete. He's still capo even though he lost control of the black market. It's because Ray forced his hand in punishment in order to keep the peace.
- Darwin

TRIAD

The Triad are the newest criminal organization to arrive in Cuba. They have made themselves indispensable in commercial areas of Mariel Bay as dockworkers and drone controllers. Instead of working the same gambling and drug angles that the other syndicates fight over, the Triad developed BTLs and product counterfeiting, markets not being exploited by the local established organizations. Combined with successful recruiting drives in Chinatown, the Triad has quickly made itself at home. Their trade in cheap knockoffs of locally manufactured shoes and handbags—not to mention their ersatz "hand-rolled" cigars—has put them at odds with the Batista, who trade in expensive, high-end Cuban merchandise.

VORY

The Russian criminal organization, Vor, existed in Cuba long before communism, but they were never as infamous as the Batista. At the time, they were still trying to establish themselves in the gambling racket in order to fund North American ventures. After the revolution and exile of the Batista, the Vor quickly became diplomats and government advisors at the Russian embassy.

- Not typical Vory strategy.
- BTL Bailey

- No, but it's of the Avtoritet. When caught in a revolution where people are being executed left and right, it's best not to give them another target.
- Darwin

During the communist era, they had to work with patience so as not to upset diplomatic relations. No gambling, for example, because Fidel hated gambling. It is rumored that it was the Vory working quietly behind the scenes that pushed the government incrementally onto the path it followed, leading to the flight and self-imposed exile of Fidel's successor. Un-

LUAN YOON

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 4
Type: Legwork
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Smoking)
Personal Life: Single

Description: Luan of the Dragon under the Sea Triad has established himself as chief engineer for the Odebren facility at Mariel Bay. The Odebren facility was built by an Amazonian company contracted to work on the bay's expansion. After that project ended, it was converted to one of the automated cargo-exchange systems. Mr. Yoon and a handful of deckers maintain the Odebren drone and robotic control systems. Yoon keeps the books obscure and cargos shuffling, making it impossible for anyone to notice the small percentage of containers that sometimes appear or disappear. If you're looking for what got delivered at a certain time, Mr. Yoon may be able to help.

BAO JIN

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 5
Type: Shadow Service
Preferred payment method: Cash (credstick)
Hobbies/Vice: Social Habit (Smoking)
Personal Life: Single

Description: Bao Jin leads the distribution of BTLs out of Chinatown in Havana. He has a network of SINless who bring chips to navigation halls around Revolution Square that cater to travelers. While few Cubans use such things, tourists occasionally need one; especially if they had a "bad trip" to get here.

HOST: ODEBREN FACILITY

Rating	Attack	Sleaze	Data Proc.	Firewall
4	7	6	4	5

Installed IC: Jammer, Marker, Scramble, Track

Slaved Devices: Remote Operated Cranes, Security Cameras, Drones

Spiders: 1

Sculpting: Real-scale version of the storage and dock parts of the facility, but only in greyscale, like it's an unfinished work.

fortunately these changes also opened Cuba up to the return of the Batista.

The Vory already had some success in establishing a smuggling route through the Russian flights to Cuba and connections within the old government. But they had two setbacks in gathering shestiorkas/soldatos from the existing gangs. The Batista brought in some serious revenue to purchase the loyalties of vodoun gangs that the Vory were working hard to intimidate. The other setback was with the Houngan War where the tsar backed the House of Jah for leadership over the other houses, only to see Aaron Maldives slaughter the Jah leaders. Under the Neo-Communist government, the Vory successfully built the Flamingo Casino into the star of the Caribbean. At the same time they developed a successful network of gambling houses and casinos that cater to every level of society. Income from these gives them the funds they need to compete with the Batista on recruitment. Taijha, who married into the Denver Vory, also has family with the Cuban Vory. Her second cousin Jubilie plays a similar role in using vodoun rituals and sorcery to serve the Vory.

ZOBOP

The Zobop is divided into many semi-independent houses operating under the loose control of a central council. There's at least one Zobop house on every island in the Caribbean League; several if there's enough business to support them. In Cuba the main house is the House of Christobal. The patron loa of House of Christobal is Krabinay, and the house is led by Mama Pauvre and Papa Crépuscule. The Zobop operate through fear and extortion. While this sounds like any other criminal organization, their use of fear works at a religious/belief level rather than in the form of violence.

- Losing one's soul is a particular worry among much of the Caribbean population.
- Abracadavre

The Zobop dominate the Cuban black market for Awakened drugs, reagents, and other magical paraphernalia. They are also the only criminal organization to traffic in zombies and vampire slaves. The Zobop are into

TSAR EDVARD LANSKI

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle
Connection Rating: 8
Type: Personal Favor, Networking, Legwork
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Nothing of interest or of use
Personal Life: Widowed
Description: Tsar Lanski controls all of the Vory operations in Cuba—usually from the Flamingo Casino, where he can keep tabs on the competition. He presents the world with a cool and urbane demeanor, but underneath is still the dark heart of the Vory who built coral reefs with bodies of his enemies and those who failed him. Its a testament to his patience and care that he carries out those undetected disposals under the close scrutiny of both his competition and President Martinez.

BABA YAGA

Metatype: Elf
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 5
Type: Shadow Service
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Bad Habit (BTLs)
Personal Life: Single
Description: Baba Yaga is the code name for the Vory's top-ranked Carib League assassin. He has embraced the Zobop concept of religious fear and reshaped it for his own purposes. His fame has created a mashed-up myth that Baba Yaga is the patron loa of the Vory, and it's through the tete gifts that he kills those who misbehave.

PAPA CRÉPUSCULE

Metatype: Human
Sex: Male
Age: Middle age
Connection Rating: 8
Type: Personal Favor
Preferred payment method: Service (shadowrunner job)
Hobbies/Vice: Personal Grooming (Clothes)
Personal Life: None of your damn business (very private)
Description: Papa Crépuscule (Twilight) is a dark and wan-looking type whencompared to the cheerful Mama. He polices the work of his krewe on the streets of Havana. Papa Crépuscule gained his fame for daring nighttime raids on gambling halls in his youth. He didn't become the steppen-razor of the house until later on. When he first mounted Krabinay, he lost that carefree side of himself.

securing personal wealth and power, though they avoid the Matrix and financial crime since they don't have the infrastructure for it. The house of Christobal's krewe has changed over the years, due to several conflicts with the Batista and competition with other houses. The death of Papa Marais in 2067 in a firefight at the train station and a krewe fight in the Guachinango barrens between House Christobal and House Trafficante in 2070 gave them a territorial setback when compared to the Batista and the Vory. While the house is traditionally Vodoun, it also includes Awakened of Obeah and Santeria traditions. The major loa of House Christobal is Krabinay. Krabinay is a dangerous Petro loa. He doesn't like people staring at him. Even more dangerous, though, is House Trafficante,who have chosen Marinette as their main tete. Marinette doesn't like seeing her people in bondage, and she is sadistically cruel.

- One thing to clarify: There are technically no "good" and "evil" loa; it's more "cool-tempered" and "hot-tempered."
- Abracadavre

- Fundamentally I agree with you. But there are those like Krabinay who perform virtually no useful services for metahumanity
- Darwin

- Unlike the Batista, they have a fundamental following through religion; everyone in Cuba knows who Krabinay is, even if they don't know the serviteur. It's something the Mafia can't replicate.
- Abracadavre

SUKUYAN

POSTED BY: MAGISTER
PIRATED BY: KANE

When HMHVV Strain 1 was introduced to the Caribbean, there were unexpected variations to vampiric transformation—mutations that manifested in nearly fifty percent of indigenous human population who were infected. Called the Sukuyan vampiric traits, these mutations seem to be linked to genetic markers peculiar to the indigenous Taino people. Sukuyan vampires grow pronounced canines, but their skin does not become as markedly pale; the color of their eyes changes to lighter tones—brown becoming orange, for example. Tests have shown Sukuyan vampires can drink alcohol without nausea and swim without difficulty.

Taino Indians originally occupied the Greater Antilles and are a subgroup of Arawakan Indians native to northern South America from the Atlantic to the Andes Mountains. Genetic statistical modeling indicates that as much as forty-five percent of the Caribbean League's human population—if they were infected with HMHVV

I and survived—would develop the Sukuyan traits. It is conjectured that that percentage would taper off among indigenous peoples the farther one got from the Greater Antilles and the concentration of Taino genetic material. Modeling suggests the Amazonian Arawak subgroup, for example, would have a twenty-five percent chance of manifesting Sukuyan traits.

Despite zombies and the animated dead being common and widely accepted throughout the Caribbean League, the Infected are a special case. They are widely feared and often considered monsters. While "Infected" is the official terminology used by all government and medical personnel, the phrase used by ninety percent of the population is *sin alma*: "soulless." A central belief of every religious tradition in the Caribbean is soul dualism. The *gros bon ange* ("big good angel") protects and animates the body and the *ti bon ange* (little good angel) protects and enlightens the mind and heart. Given this context, the perception among the people of the Caribbean region is that the *ti bon ange* of vampires, ghouls, and any other Infected have been lost or stripped away, and the *gros bon ange* has been irrevocably corrupted by the loss. So strong and deeply ingrained is this conviction that Infected believers frequently suffer psychological and emotional distress in the presence of spiritual talismans or religious objects.

- Because they are "soulless," the Zobob have no qualms in enslaving them. There's a high demand for controllable Awakened beasts in private security. The price is almost doubled if they are intelligent enough to take orders. So you can imagine the price for a vampire guard.
- Abracadavre

- 50,000 nuyen for starters. On up to whatever the market will bear.
- Kane

JANUARIUS

In finding the soulless's weaknesses, magicians from the Caribbean League have found that Sukuyan vampires are particularly vulnerable to a preparation called januarius by the Zobop, which is refined from bat blood. For the duration of its effect, januarius gives the Sukuyan a sense of euphoria with auditory/visual hallucinations that can be manipulated by the creator of the preparation—a suggestive dream state. Januarius does not appear to affect any other infected, including non-Sukuyan vampires. Because Sukuyan vampires are programmed before they go to market, the end owner cannot alter their behaviors while drugged unless the magician gives the commands. There is, of course, a black-market workaround: Allow the vampire's dosage to lapse, then pressure them to learn a new set of commands in exchange for the next dose. The vitality of januarius is limited to two days; there is no way traders can stock up. This gives the Zobop a significant trade leverage.

Once addicted to januarius, the vampire's dietary requirement is reduced from once a day to once a week as long as he receives regular doses of the drug. The drug also inhibits the vampires' adverse reaction to sunlight, so he takes damage every two minutes instead of every minute. The Zobop are the exclusive traders of Sukuyan slaves. With each vampire selling for around 50,000 nuyen and maintenance doses costing 7,500 nuyen each, the Zobop jealously and aggressively protects its product and monopoly.

While it is possible to break the Sukuyan vampires' physical addiction to januarius, the psychological damage irreversibly leads to depression and apathy until the victim eventually wastes away

SUKUYAN

Same quality as Vampire (p. 140, *Run Faster*).

Remove: Induced Dormancy (Lack of Air), –4 dice pool modifier to all swimming-related tests

Add: Dietary Requirement (Salt), Vulnerability (Wood)

Notes: Sukuyan can drink alcohol and fruit juice without suffering nausea. The Sukuyan's Immunity (Toxins) does not protect against Awakened drugs or the toxins of Awakened critters.

JANUARIUS

Vector: Ingestion, Injection

Speed: 1 Combat Turn

Duration: 7 days

Addiction Type: Both

Effect: +1 Physical Limit, Euphoria (8 – Body hours, minimum 1 hour)

Addiction Rating: 8

Addiction Threshold: 3

Additional Game Notes: Preparaing januarius is an Alchemy + Magic [Astral] (12, 8 hours) Extended Test. Any glitch results in a failed preparation. A critical glitch may result in an accident that harms the preparer.

Once addicted, the Sukuyan's dietary requirement needs are once every seven days instead of every day. Double the time for damage from severe allergy to Sunlight.

RENFIELD

To obtain pawns to do their bidding during the day, those infected with HMHVV I (hereafter "vampires") who have talent in alchemy can create a magical preparation. In an extensive process combining several reagents and the vampire's own blood, the result is one

RENFIELD

Vector: Ingestion, Injection
Speed: 1 Combat Turn
Duration: 7 days
Addiction Type: Both
Effect: Agility +1, Intuition +1, Strength +1, +1 Physical Limit, Euphoria (8 – Body hours, minimum 1 hour), +1D6 Initiative
Addiction Rating: 8
Addiction Threshold: 3
Additional Game Notes: Preparing renfield is an Alchemy + Magic (Astral) (18, 12 hours) Extended Test. Any glitches during this test cause the drug to impart one less point of Essence per glitch to the recipient when it is taken. A critical glitch means the enchantment fails, and the vampire loses the point of Essence.

Once the pawn has become addicted to the drug, he gains the Immunity (Age) critter power (p. 397, SR5) and the Essence Loss weakness (p. 401, SR5). Immunity (Age) remains in effect as long as the pawn receives a regular dose of the drug. What constitutes "regular" is left to the gamemaster's discretion, but most vampires won't give a dose more frequently than once a quarter, due to the great personal expense involved in creating it. Once transformed, the pawn is dependent upon the drug to maintain his Essence; even if he breaks the habit, he'll still have the Essence Loss weakness. Each dose gives him 1D6 points of Essence; he can carry up to twice his natural Essence, just like a vampire. Pawns addicted to renfield have a sixth sense when near the infected who gave it to them, much like from a group bond ritual (Essence in meters).

As with other preparations, an Awakened individual can assense a dram of renfield for the vampire's astral signature (p. 312, SR5) or use it as a link in a ritual (p. 295, SR5). A dram of renfield can be spoofed provided the magician has assensed the vampire's aura (p. 312, SR5).

GAMEMASTER NOTES ON RENFIELD

The interaction of renfield and players is a risky one and should only be used for storyline purposes. Vampire characters can unbalance the game by injecting every potential contact, PC, and enemy with renfield and turning them into pawns. A character addicted to renfield will not be a playable character in long-term campaigns, as the Essence loss is not curable and creates a dependency on the vampire who drugged him, even if the vampire is also a PC.

dram of renfield. Though details of the actual formula vary depending on where and from whom the vampire learned it, all renfield has the physical appearance of blood and stays warm while potent. The potency of a dram of renfield lasts one week. Renfield is both physiologically and psychologically addictive. Once addicted, the pawn does not present any obvious traits or any symptoms of the HMHVV. However, the aging process appears to stop while the drug is active in their system.

The physiological addiction appears permanent, and no medical procedure or support can stop the eventually lethal ebbing of the pawn's life. Once given a dose of renfield, the pawn appears restored and rejuvenated, but assensing can quickly confirm the vitality is unnatural. Studies have shown pawns addicted to renfield can recognize and are drawn to the vampire whose blood was used. For the weaker-minded pawns, it's this psychological connection that compels them to obey the vampire. Others sense the power renfield provides and obey in order to earn subsequent doses. Pawns can suffer other psychological problems from prolonged use of renfield. Prime examples include renfield syndrome, drinking blood, and zoophageous mania, eating animals (raw and in the wild, not prepared in restaurants).

GAME INFORMATION

CORPS CADAVRE

Corps cadavres are the dead animated by ritual magic. This is about as close to the trids as the expected mindless dead can be. They may be slow, but they don't shamble and they don't eat brains (unless commanded to). Corps cadavres, like all homunculi, obey their master to the best of their ability. However, necromancy says that bones have memories, and homunculi take on some of the personality traits of their creators, so corps cadavres have been known to interpret commands to their own benefit. Many practitioners put preparations in the cadavers' mouths and sew them shut to prevent any chance some remnant of the bodies' original owners might speak and to keep other spirits from trying to take over their creations. The practice of creating corps cadavres is illegal in most countries and frowned upon everywhere—the practice is always carried out in secret.

Corps cadavres can be created with the homunculus ritual (p. 298, *SR5*) with the target being a corpse (prepared or unprepared). The Obeah and Vodou practitioners have adjusted the ritual so that net hits can alternately be used to increase the number of corpses that can be animated within the ritual. With each corpse animated, there is a chance that some memory of its original occupant will remain. To make the test, roll the Force of the spell. Each hit means that a random active or knowledge skill once known by the subject can be used

by the corps cadavre during the ritual's duration. This can be a high risk with a high-Force ritual with a corpse of an enemy. There are no corps cadavre mages or deckers but for a different reason: they're dead.

If a corps cadavre has a Willpower higher than 1, it can attempt to resist once a day using a Logic + Willpower Extended Test with a threshold equal to the Force of the ritual.

GRAND ZOMBIE

To make things even more confusing, if a corps cadavre breaks free of the magician, it is called a grand zombie, though it is in no way related to a real zombie. Grand zombies are a shadow of their former selves, an afterimage of strong memories enhanced by the ritual magic. They sometimes attempt to complete tasks begun in life but interrupted by death—how determined they are is governed by the strength of the emotions tied to the memory. A grand zombie's lifespan is still limited by the ritual, and in the end they disappear into dust. Grand zombies seem to welcome this, as it's difficult to imagine any wanting to extend their "life."

CORPS CADAVRE (MINION) RITUAL

This ritual is similar to that of the homunculus, but instead of a limitation of Force x 10 kilograms of mass to animate, this is specifically limited to corpses, and the limitation is that total points in Body to be raised cannot exceed Force x 10. A corps cadavre raised lasts for a number of days equal to net hits on the Sealing Test times the sum of the participants' Magic ratings. Net hits can also be used to raise one more corps cadavre as part of the ritual if still within the ritual's limitation. A corps cadavre's skills are equal to half the Force of the ritual (rounded up). Roll the Force of the ritual again. Net hits will determine the number of additional skills or knowledge each of the corps cadavres can use. Skill levels should be comparable to the levels they had in life. Alternatively, the gamemaster may use the net hits to raise the Willpower and Intuition of the corps cadavre as the personality attempts to free its limited existence from the hands of the master. At the end of the ritual's duration, the corps cadavre will crumble to dust. A magician (or leader if part of a group casting the ritual) cannot control and create more than two times his Charisma in corps cadavres.

CORPS CADAVRE

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C
*	F-2	F-2	F	1	1	1	1

Initiative	(F + 1) + 1D6
Movement	Agility x 2/Agility x 3
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Sapience
Optional Powers**	Magic Resistance, Skill (see below)

* The body of a corps cadavre is equivalent to the body of the deceased.

**When a corps cadavre breaks free, it can gain additional powers as a grand zombie. For every two points of Willpower, the grand zombie gains 1 additional power. Substitute Force for Magic Rating in relation to the effect of powers. New skills are skills that would have been known by the deceased. Skill areas such as hacking, sorcery, and conjuring only work in a knowledge capacity, as a corps cadavre cannot access the Matrix nor cast spells, create preparations, or conjure spirits.

OBEAH

Obeah is one of several religious and magical traditions brought to the Americas by the people of Africa. Like Vodou, Obeah has suffered the persecution of being perceived as a malignant magical practice by Western societies. These perceptions are fed by fear of the Obeah practitioner's supposed knowledge of poisons and

curses and use of dark, buried charms and blood sacrifices. The name "Obeah" relates to bad magic rooted in the Ashanti people, whose magicians practiced Obi (good) and Obeah (bad) sorcery. Obeah has more in common with Hoodoo and Juju than with Vodou and Santería or even Palo. Vodou and Santeria center on venerating the loa and orisha (and in Santería's case, a pantheon of Catholic saints as well), going so far as to use possession as the source of spiritual power. Obeah respects the loa and orishas but keeps them at arm's length, treating them as guides, advisers, and sources of spiritual energy for sorcery and enchanting while avoiding the personal commitment and spiritual intimacy of possession. More than any other belief system to emerge from Africa, Obeah has a fractured and contentious past that often put practitioners in conflict—sometimes violently—with other religions and among themselves. Currently, for example, there is open conflict between Obeah magicians and practitioners of Myal in Jamaica—Myal is a variant of Obeah that has adopted the Santería tradition of incorporating Catholic saints in their worship in seeking to attain a deeper and richer connection with the spirit world.

Practitioners of Obeah employ both plant- and animal-based reagents in their sorceries and enchantments. Those most often used within the Zobop are based on animal blood. While there is no magical difference between animal blood and other reagents, painting the ritual circles in blood has a psychological and emotional impact on the practitioner.

Papa Ebenezer walks the dark alleys near Revolution Square, pickpocketing unsuspecting tourists. With bits of cloth, jewelry, or food wrappers, Ebenezer will put curses on his victims then request payment in order to lift them. His curses are mere illusion and annoying watcher spirits, as his "entertainment license" limits such magic.

OBEAH TRADITION

Combat: Fire
Detection: Water
Health: Man
Illusion: Guidance
Manipulation: Task
Drain: Willpower + Charisma

SANTERÍA TRADITION

Combat: Guidance
Detection: Guardian
Health: Earth
Illusion: Man
Manipulation: Water
Drain: Willpower + Intuition
Note: Santería is a possession tradition.

SANTERÍA

The Santería tradition is a blending of Yoruba mythology with Catholic mysticism and the spiritual traditions of the indigenous Caribbean peoples. They worship nature and the connection of life to the Ache (Mana). Their Orishas (spirits) are a blending of Roman Catholic saints with Yoruba deities. The terms orisha and saint are used interchangeably. Early slaves taken to a strange land and forced to obey the rituals of an unfamiliar singular god met their spiritual crises by studying the unnatural religion. Their studies were rewarded by the discovery the distant god worked through saints—divine beings with attributes and responsibilities of the orisha. To the early believers, the strange religion was merely an unfamiliar aspect of the true faith, one that deepened and strengthened it. Their captors were pleased by the slaves' "conversion" to Catholicism but persecuted any use of healing rituals or herbal medicines. The core tenet of Santería is perseverance in overcoming all obstacles, whether spiritual, emotional, or physical.

Spiritually the santeros and santeras (priests and priestesses) serve as the living's ambassadors and advocates to the spirit world. While possession rituals similar to those of the Vodou tradition are a vital part of their relationship with the saints and orishas, santeros and santeras minister to the living primarily as sorcerers and conjurers who specialize in health, healing, and cleansing spells. Santería adepts are equally devoted to finding harmony with the spirit world. This tradition works in their favor when facing and overcoming challenges. "Self-initiation" is very rare but not unheard of among the santeros and santeras. Usually the candidate/supplicant is sponsored by an established adept who guides them through their spiritual journey. All reagents in the Santería tradition are plant based—many of the plants have secondary medicinal effects.

Andres Toit runs a psychology/espiritismo office in Old Havana. He believes that good and evil spirits affect the health, luck, and other elements of human life. These may be symbolic spirits, such as addiction, fear, and anger, or they can be actual toxic spirits or shades, so he's ready for both. His office is always open, but by appointment only. When homeopathic techniques don't help, he will bring his sword and face the menacing spirit head on.

SPIRIT WRITING

Even in organizations that are not, strictly speaking, secret, the details of the organization's inner workings are usually hidden, the identities of its members concealed, and communication between members or houses kept secret. Of course this is true by a factor of ten for organizations that really are secret. The Zobop are able to create physical letters or house passports

for their members, documents that appear to the mundane and most Awakened to be nothing more than doodled symbols and random scribbles. The Zobop call it "spirit writing," and some scholars believe it may represent an actual spirit language, though this is purely speculation. It is produced when a loa mounts a serviteur to write a message to the houngan. There is no cypher or key for decoding spirit writing, because not just the physical symbols but the emotional context must be understood. Anyone assensing such writing detects a complex but impenetrable aura. The message can only be read by a spirit from the same metaplane or hypermetaplane as its author. For example, a spirit not of the loa would not be able to read a message written by the loa Papa Legba but would recognize the hyperplane Papa Legba inhabits.

ZOMBIES

Many people conflate zombies with ghouls, a confusion exacerbated by centuries of zombie myths, legends, and B-movies created before the advent of real magic. Ghouls are the infected victims of HMHVV, bearing little resemblance to animated corpses (corps cadavres). And, yes, there is a sub-classification of "undead" zombies that are actually corpses inhabited by spirits. (These spirits seem to delight in perpetuating and/or reenacting schlockiest of the B-movie traditions, thus generating further confusion about zombies.)

Real zombies are the living victims of magical drugs and ritual magic. Becoming a zombie does not significantly alter the victims' appearance—they certainly don't look dead—but they cannot speak and a universal side effect of the drugs is severely bloodshot eyes. A zombie with cybereyes would be indistinguishable from a BTL junkie with cybereyes.

Zombies have no will of their own, and while they are technically "skilled labor" (as opposed to corps cadavres), the required ritual severely restricts skills linked to higher thinking—there are no zombie mages or deckers. Zombies can only be commanded by the Obeah witchdoctor who performed the ritual or anyone they designate as the zombies' master. Zombies do not experience pain and are less susceptible to injury, but they can die from untreated wounds, starvation, drowning, fire, etc. Zombies do not need sleep and can theoretically work twenty-four hours a day, but brief respites to allow overworked muscles to recover are prudent. Zombies must be fed regularly, but brains are not a dietary requirement.

It is estimated that one out of every one thousand residents of the Caribbean League has been a zombie slave at least once in their life. The SINless are the most vulnerable—selling oneself as a zombie slave for specific periods of time to pay off debts is not uncommon. Loan sharks routinely sell zombies to plantations, demolition companies, and cargo ships.

Perhaps because it is such a pervasive practice, zombie slaves are not, on the whole, abused—though the treatment by many owners borders on neglect, and they work hard for long hours at dull and/or dangerous jobs—and are released when their contract expires. The victim will remember their zombie experience, though usually in a jumbled, dream-like fashion. Some unscrupulous bokor, who use zombies for illegal or secret activities, have experimented with laés in their zubembie powder to ensure the victim has no memory of events during her time as a zombie.

ZUBEMBIE POWDER

Zombie powder is composed of tetrodotoxin (TTX) and datura blended with irritants designed to open minute breaks in the skin, allowing the TTX and datura to reach the victim's bloodstream. Irritant mixtures vary by region and houngan house, but ingredients usually include powdered glass, poisonous frog, and stinging nettles. Once in the bloodstream, the TTX and datura quickly immobilize the victim with a death-like trance—the victim loses motor control, sensory ability, and then consciousness in a matter of seconds. Hallucinations are common, as is the perception that they are dying. Preparing zubembie powder is a Chemistry + Logic [Mental] (8, 4 hours) Extended Test.

ZUBEMBIE POWDER

Vector: Contact,
Speed: Immediate
Penetration: 0
Power: 12
Effect: Paralysis, Zombie Preparation (see description)

Reduce the target's Willpower by 3 (to a minimum of 1) for the remainder of the toxin's effect. The TTX and Datura come from awakened species of puffer fish and moonflowers that react to magic. In this case the drug makes the body more susceptible to magic (do not add the subjects Essence or Magic attribute in resisting mana-based spells).

ZOMBIE (MINION) RITUAL

The minimum force of the ritual is equal to the subject's current willpower. Most subjects are unwilling. If the zubembie powder was not used, add the subject's Essence or Magic attribute (whichever is higher) to (Force x 2) of the ritual during the Seal the Ritual step, otherwise it's only (Force x 2). When complete, the subject is left in a mindless state and unable to resist the

commands of the leader of the ritual. The Zombie effect lasts for a number of days equal to net hits on the Sealing Test times the sum of the participants' Magic ratings. Those under the influence of the Zombie ritual appear to be lethargic or sleepwalking and are unable to speak. A Magician (or Leader if part of a group casting the ritual) can only control and create a number of zombies equal to two times his Charisma.

ZOMBIE

As a zombie, the subject's physical attributes remain unchanged, while the subject's mental attributes are reduced by half. The Force of the magic that created the zombies acts like counterspelling dice against mana-based spells. Zombies do not feel pain, therefore don't suffer wound penalties. A zombie can attempt to resist once a day using a Logic + Willpower Extended Test with a threshold of the Force of the Ritual.

WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ZUBEMBIE

Gamemasters should only use zubembie powder or Zombie rituals for storyline purposes. Characters will be unable to resist or control themselves while under the influence of zubembie powder. Since the Zombie ritual is without an anchor or spell component, it may last for several game sessions.

AWAKENED CREATURES OF THE CARIBBEAN

CHICKCHARNEY

Chickcharney is an amusing name for what is essentially a one-meter-tall barn owl. It is the reappearance of the Bahamian great owl, which went extinct in the seventeenth century. Originally indigenous to Andros, the chickcharney has been found on all the islands in the Caribbean League. Its body feathers are light to medium brown and its face a pale dun—colors that blend well with the woods it inhabits. It has disproportionately short wings, and its awkward, hopping flight resembles that of a chicken. The chickcharney is regarded as a metaspecies because those who have encountered it in the wild have found themselves lost or suffering extraordinarily bad luck. Natives who attempt to hunt chickcharney for food find the large chicken to be a challenge.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	5	8	3	5	5	3	5	1	6	5

Initiative	7 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x6/+2
Condition Monitor	11/11
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 6, Social 7
Armor	0
Skills	Perception 3, Running 2, Sneaking 3, Unarmed Combat 3

CHUPACABRAS

The chupacabra, literally "goat sucker," was a mythical Latin American creature that drained goats of blood and reputedly abducted small children who did not obey their parents. When goats and cattle in rural areas began suffering vampiric attacks, investigators discovered a nocturnal, bipedal lizard was responsible. The creature, which the locals dubbed chupacabra, is about a meter tall (not counting a spiny head crest it raises when alarmed) and appears to be an improbable cross between an iguana and an arboreal monkey. Its head, forelegs, and abdomen are armored with green scales, while the rest of the body is covered with thick, coarse hair; its tail is prehensile, and its lemur-like eyes unnaturally large and red. Whether the creature is engineered or a metaspecies is hotly debated. Genetic testing has discovered a blending of reptilian and mammalian DNA, plus a heretofore undiscovered non-contagious strain of HMHVV (which is not passed on to the chupacabra's victims). Chupacabras generally prefer rural or unpopulated areas but have been found along the banks of the Gauchinango River, in the barrens less than five kilometers from Havana.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
8	8	8	6	6	3	5	2	2	6	5

Initiative	8 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x8/+3
Condition Monitor	12/11
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 6, Social 6
Armor	4
Skills	Climbing 4, Perception 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Concealment (Self Only), Essence Drain, Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claw/Bite: DV 6P, AP –1, Reach +1), Paralyzing Touch

MAGUI

The magui is a native Awakened species of Cuba and metaspecies of the Cuban boa. This mottled green and brown snake can be up to six meters in length and over a third of a meter thick, but its most distinctive feature is the brace of sharp horns rising from its forehead. The magui is semiaquatic and sometimes known as "Mother of Waters." When hunting underwater it sometimes uses its horns to harpoon prey, though it is just as likely to use the constrictor's usual hold-and-suffocate technique both on land and in the water. Magui have been observed hunting sharks, turtles, and even dolphins in open water, though its diet on land is similar to any other boa's. Magui prefer living in rocky coastal areas; they avoid populated beaches—metahumans evidently not being on the menu. They are mild mannered, and a magui that wanders into dangerous waters such as shipping lanes can be readily coaxed to safe areas by wildlife specialist and even lifeguards.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6	6	3	12	2	4	6	3	2	6

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+3
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 6, Social 5
Armor	2
Skills	Climbing 4, Infiltration 4, Perception 4, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Thermal), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 6P, AP —), Natural Weapon (Horn: DV 6P, AP 1 Reach 1)

NIGHT MANTA

The rare and elusive night manta can be found around the coastal areas of the Gulf of Mexico. It is the metaspecies of the eagle ray. The average night manta is 180 centimeters in length, with a seventy-centimeter tail that ends in four barbs, each ten centimeters long, that extrude neurotoxins. Its jet-black wings span three meters, and its mouth is ringed with several rows of needle-sharp teeth. While its natural parental species is restricted to warm ocean waters, the night manta is imbued with magical ability to swim through the air. The night manta lacks air-breathing lungs, however, and relies on cutaneous respiration (similar to a mud skipper) to draw oxygen in through its skin. A special mucus coating facilitates the transfer while preventing dehydration.

Because this coating would dry quickly in the sun, the night manta is nocturnal. The night manta relies on its dark coloration and magic when hunting. On land it preys on small mammals, especially bats, while over water it feeds on squid and other small marine animals that come to the surface at night. The night manta paralyzes its prey with a whip-like strike with its spiked tail, then remains airborne as it devours the still-living creature. Night mantas present little danger to metahumans, who are much too large to be prey, but they have been known to sting in self-defense when trapped or frightened.

In Cuba, the night manta is a protected species, under the care of specially trained wildlife specialists. Any night mantas found too close to civilization are captured and released in the wild. Special night cruises use drones with halogen lamps to attract bats in hopes of luring night mantas out for the tourists' cameras, but they are only occasionally successful.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	4	4	9	2	4	3	5	3	6	5

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+3
Condition Monitor	13/11
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	6
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Tail Spikes) 3, Perception 2, Shadowing 2, Spellcasting 4, Swimming 2, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Dual Natured, Innate Spell (Levitate), Natural Ranged Weapon (Sting: DV 2P, AP —), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 4P, AP —), Shadow Cloak, Silence, Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed 1 Combat Turn, Power: 6, Effect: Physical Damage), Note –1 Reach

LOA, ORISHA, AND YOU

Regarding Vodou and Santeria, magicians typically start out by summoning lesser loa or orisha as per the Possession rules (p. 197, *Street Grimoire*). When a servitor (living vessel, p. 197, *Street Grimoire*) or magician is possessed by these spirits, they manifest a veve on their skin (usually on the face or arms). A veve is the symbolic pattern representing the inhabiting spirit and minor shamanic mask. This is often also painted on the servitor as part of the ritual acting as a calling to that specific spirit when creating a living vessel. An Arcana + Logic [Mental] (2) Test can identify the veve.

ARCANA SUCCESS TABLE

NET HITS	DESCRIPTION
1	Identify the Tradition (Vodou, Santeria, etc.)
2	Identify the spirit type (water, guardian, etc.)
3	Identify the spirit's common name (Agwe, Drowned Sailor, Magui, etc)

Major loa such as Agwe, Papa Legba, and Ogun are essentially great form spirits that cannot be bound by traditional means (the attempt would be dangerously offensive to them) and cannot be called through the Summon Great Form Spirit Ritual. A magician must use the Great Form Possession metamagic. Once successfully possessed by a loa/orisha as per the possession rules, the magician not only manifests the veve, but also some of the physical characteristics of the loa as part of the spirit mask. Loa can gift a possessed adept with powers, but as with skills and knowledge, the spirit cannot access the adept's own powers, nor do the spirit's powers stack with the adept's powers. Due to the commonality underlying the Vodoun and Santeria traditions, many of the loa are also orisha. However, Santeria magicians can summon only those loa marked as "both" or "Rada." Petro loa are served only through the Vodoun tradition.

GREAT FORM POSSESSION

Magicians who follow a possession tradition and magicians who have learned the channeling metamagic (p. 148, *Street Grimoire*) may call greater spirits into themselves. The magician must successfully complete two Conjuring + Magic Tests (including drain) in succession and of equal Force to call on a loa/orisha. Net hits from the first test determine the great form spirit's

power (p.136, *Street Grimoire*), as long as the magician also knows the Summon Great Form Spirit ritual. Net hits from the second test determine the number of services owed by the spirit. Note that this great form spirit is only summoned, never bound.

WATER

AGWE (BOTH)

Agwe is the loa of the sea and can be as unpredictable as the open water. He can be as serene as a benevolent breeze guiding sailors to port one minute and as raging as a driven squall the next. Agwe appears as a man drenched in water and draped with seaweed and shells. He has the airs of a captain and expects to be treated as such.

Additional Optional Powers: Iron Lungs (4 levels) (p.23 SS), Skill (Pilot [Watercraft]), Skill (Swimming)

LESSER LOA

Drowned Sailor (Petro)
Magui (Rada)

GUARDIAN

OGOUN (BOTH)

Ogoun is the loa of Iron and of War—a primal loa who will fight for his people and against injustice. He is the symbolic edge of the knife and can either kill or save depending on which side of the loa was chosen. He can be stubborn and proud, but he is not a braggart. If there's a fight, he'll probably join in to finish it. Ogoun is depicted as a powerfully muscled warrior in military dress.

Additional Optional Powers: Critical Strike (Blades), Skill (Armorer)

SHANGO (BOTH)

Shango is the loa of lightning, thunder, and fire. His voice is the peal of thunder, and he often boasts of his accomplishments and victories. He, too, will fight, but not for ideals nor with the martial discipline of Ogoun. He fights with passion, from the heart—whether out of love or rage depends on the side of the loa chosen. Shango and Ogoun are often rivals for the affections of the Loa Erzulie. Shango appears regal with a crown.

Additional Optional Powers: Enhanced Accuracy (Pistols), Skill (Leadership)

MARINETTE (PETRO)

Marinette is both feared and respected as a cruel loa for whom violence is always justified, always desired. She loves the smell of flame and destruction and enjoys casually recounting the acts of torture and mayhem she has committed. She hates to see the people who worship her in prison or suffering and will do everything in her power to deliver them. She shows no such respect for anyone she possesses, using them any way she must to achieve her goal. Marinette appears as the burnt skeleton of a woman risen from her funeral pyre.

Additional Optional Powers: Killing Hands, Skill (Intimidation)

INVOCATION ART

Great Form Possession (Metamagic)

Summon Great Form Spirit Ritual (Ritual Spellcasting & Conjuring) (p.136, *Street Grimoire*)

Ally Conjuration Ritual (Ritual Spellcasting & Conjuring) (p. 201, *Street Grimoire*)

Govi (Alchemy) (p. 212, *Street Grimoire*)

LESSER LOA

Hunter (Rada)
Pirate Captain (Petro)

MAN

OBATALA (RADA)

He is the Loa of Purity and opposed to all forces of evil. Obatala esteems diplomacy and negotiations over conflict, and the other loa respect his decisions, often asking him to resolve their disputes. He is a stickler when it comes to the law. He can appear judgmental or aloof at times because he disdains the slovenly, the dirty, and the unclean—attributes often associated with evil and cruelty. He appears as an elderly man with snow-white hair and garments.

Additional Optional Powers: Iron Will (2 levels), Skill (Negotiations)

GHEDE (PETRO)

Clever Ghede is the loa of death and the dead. He respects nothing—especially the affairs of mortals, which he finds farcically amusing. He laughs at the mortal fear of death. He is also a glutton for food and drink; as he puts it, "Death must consume all things." Ghede will always help if you don't mind his mocking or casual approach to danger. Ghede appears mummified, wearing a top hat, sunglasses, and a cane.

Additional Optional Powers: Counter Strike (1 level), Skill (Clubs)

KRABINAY (PETRO)

Krabinay is both physically violent and emotionally paranoid; both literally and metaphysically jumpy. He mistrusts metahumans, assuming every encounter is hos-

tile and a precursor to attack. Krabinay is often called upon to protect the magician from magical attacks. He doesn't like the company of "friendlier" loa and will attempt to distance himself from their positive attitude.

Additional Optional Powers: Light Body (4 levels), Skill (Counterspelling), Skill (Gymnastics)

LESSER LOA

Juggler (Rada)
Gambler (Petro)

GUIDANCE

LEGBA (BOTH)

Legba is the Old Man of the Crossroads, divine messenger of the loa, Opener of the Way, and the gatekeeper between the visible and invisible worlds. Legba's veve can be found in the ritual spirit designs of almost every Vodou, Santeria, and Obeah tradition. Legba can be the bringer of fortune or the harbinger of ill will, depending on which side of the loa was chosen. He demands respect and formality in every interaction. This of course puts him at odds with Ghede's jabs and mockery. He will guide the magician to his goal or remove obstacles from his path. Legba appears as an old man who walks with a limp.

Additional Optional Powers: Smashing Blow, Skill (Leadership)

DAMBALLAH (RADA)

Damballah is a graceful loa of the sky. His movements are usually languid, but he can act with uncanny speed when he chooses. He speaks little, preferring art and especially interpretive dance to the spoken word. This makes him great on the dance floor, but embarrassing when on stakeout. When he does speak in human tongue, it's always in metaphors and riddles. Damballah appears as a serpent, never moving in a straight line.

Additional Optional Powers: Enthralling Performance, Skill (Gymnastics)

LESSER LOA

Medicine Man (Rada)
Snake Oil Salesman (Petro)

TASK

AZACA (RADA)

Azaca is the Loa of agriculture, guardian of the destitute, and the younger brother to Ghede. Azaca is one of the very few loa Ghede respects. Though Azaca appears as a simple, barefoot farmhand, he's a shrewd strategist (not to mention an incorrigible gossip and insatiable womanizer).

Additional Optional Powers: Skill (Sneaking), Wall Running

ERZULIE (BOTH)

Erzulie is the loa of romantic love and physical passion. She can be the eternal innocent, believing the good and beauty in all things, or the worldly seductress evoking lust and manipulating jealousy depending on which aspect of the loa is chosen. She brings passion into her work while flirting with Ogun and Shango to get them to do tasks for her. Erzulie appears as a young woman who always smells of roses.

Additional Optional Powers: Skill (Con), Traceless Walk

LESSER LOA

Farmer (Rada)
Gravedigger (Petro)

EARTH

LAZARUS (ORISHA)

Lazarus is the patron of the sick and contagious diseases. He is loved by many because he can help heal, but he is also feared as speaking his name might engender plague. He appears as a man covered with sores and the scars of disease who rarely speaks, often communicating only through simple gestures.

Additional Optional Powers: Empathic Healing, Skill (Tracking)

LESSER ORISHA

Eloogun

MENTOR SPIRITS

ADVERSARY

Wherever there is cosmological order, there is an entity that wishes to overthrow it. The Adversary is the original rebel against the powers that be. Followers of the Adversary have serious issues with authority and conformity. Followers range from those dedicated to helping the underprivileged and abused (by "the man") to the one who indulges his love of anarchy for its own sake. Free will and cynicism are the Adversary follower's tools and trade.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 to demolition skill tests

Magician: +2 dice to Counterspelling and Disenchanting Tests

Adept: One free level of Iron Will

DISADVANTAGES

Because of their deep-seated hatred for authority, a teammate's use of leadership skill is counterproductive to followers of Adversary, invoking either a negative dice penalty or loss of initiative. If the plan doesn't go the way that the adversary follower wants

it to go, it takes a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test for him to get him to cooperate.

SIMILAR ARCHETYPES

Chaos, Anarchy

ALLIGATOR

Alligator feels at home in cities as well as swamps and rivers. He is ill-tempered and lazy, expecting a larger share for the work he does. He is also a big eater and drinker, but a miser when it comes to having to pay. The Alligator follower is a strong fighter and committed to finishing anything he agrees to do.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 to Intimidation Tests

Magician: +2 to Conjuring Tests for spirits of water or man (choose one)

Adept: Free Inertia Strike

DISADVANTAGES

A follower of Alligator is stubborn about changing a plan or action to which he is committed. When the rest of the team goes to Plan B, the magician must succeed in a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test for the magician to stop trying Plan A.

SIMILAR ARCHETYPES

Crocodile, Sloth, Greed

BAT

Bat is well-traveled, rarely staying in one place. As a seeker, she sets far-reaching goals and gets restless when not moving. She is adaptable and can make herself at home anywhere. Magicians following Bat keep things light and portable for traveling.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 to Navigation Tests

Magician: +1 die to Conjuring Tests for any spirit

Adept: Free Motion Sense (p. 172, *Street Grimoire*)

DISADVANTAGES

A follower of Bat is easily distracted and becomes irritable during enforced inaction. She prefers spontaneity to routine. Every week that the magician stays in the same place, she takes a -1 penalty to all actions until she finds a new place to stay. Also, unless she succeeds in a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test, she cannot enter a hangout (bar, club, restaurant) more than once in a week without suffering a -1 to all Magic tests for the next twenty-four hours.

SIMILAR ARCHETYPES

Wanderer

MONKEY

Monkey is clever and playful and finds people amusing. A follower of Monkey is a foe of evil and enjoys taunting and frustrating the plans of those who would harm him or his friends. Magicians following Monkey like to taunt opponents, using magic to misdirect, confuse, or otherwise trick them into "learning their lesson" rather than seriously harming or killing them.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 to Gymnastics Tests involving climbing.

Magician: +2 dice for spells, preparations, and spell rituals in the Manipulation category

Adept: 2 free levels of Hang Time (p. 171, *Street Grimoire*)

DISADVANTAGES

Because Monkey is not an assassin, the magician must succeed in a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test in order to strike a surprised opponent. Monkey must be able to watch his prank go off or see the look on the opponent's face after taunting them, otherwise he suffers -1 to all Magic tests until the next sunrise/sunset.

LIFE MODULES

NATIONALITY

CARIBBEAN LEAGUE

The Caribbean League is a loose confederation consisting of the following island nations:

Andros, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bonaire, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Culebra, Curaçao, Dominican Republic Territories, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama Island, Great Abaco, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, New Province, Saba, South Florida, St. Barts, St. Croix, St. Eustatius, St. John, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Maarten, St. Thomas, St. Vincent and the Grenadine, Tortola, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, Vieques, Virgin Gorda

LANGUAGES

THE TAÍNOS

The Taínos (the Good People) are indigenous to the Greater and Lesser Antilles, with established modern populations in Cuba, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Borinquen. Taínos are part of the Arawak cultural group, which includes several South American groups. The Taíno have their own distinct language and are generally peaceful fishers and gatherers. They have a shamanic and ancestor belief system devoted primarily to spirits of the jungle and the sea. Taíno priests are called Bohiques.

CARIBBEAN LEAGUE

PRIMARY LANGUAGES

French (Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique), Spanish (Boriquen, Cuba, Dominican Territories), Dutch (Aruba), or English (the rest of the Caribbean League)

Secondary Languages (choose one language with 1 rank): Creole (many distinct types), Lucimi, Taino

UNIVERSAL SKILL

Etiquette +1, Academic Knowledge: Caribbean History +1, Street Knowledge: [Island nation] +1

REGIONS/DEMOGRAPHICS

Greater Antilles	Agility +1, Athletics +1, Navigation +1, Swimming +1, SINner(5)
Lesser Antilles	Body +1, Navigation +1, Swimming +1, Diving +1, SINner(5)
Bahama Archipelago	Body +1, Navigation +1, Survival +1, Swimming +1, SINner(5)
Miami	Body +1, Navigation +1, Tracking +1, Etiquette +1, SINner(5)
SINless	Agility +1, Knowledge: [City] +1

LUCIMI

Lucimi is an ancient African ceremonial language spoken by those who practice Santeria. It's not used for daily conversation but is integral to many religious rites, secret societies, and magical rituals.

CREOLE

A patois is a blend of languages that develops when speakers of several languages routinely interact. Unlike a pidgin, which is a simplified code for conveying basic concepts across linguistic barriers, a patois can be complex, nuanced, and sophisticated. Generally speaking, Cityspeak and Streetspeak are patois. Over the course of generations a fully fledged language emerges from the patois, one with its own unique vocabulary and grammar—the patois becomes a creole. Though in general creoles can be divided into English, like Jamaican Creole, or French, like Haitian Creole, it's dangerous to oversimplify. Within the Caribbean League, every island has its own creole dialect and the mobile nature of the populations means several creoles may be represented in one place. It's not chaos—common concepts and vocabulary make communication possible, and creole-blending patois are fairly common. But contextual differences and other factors can cause miscommunication. To show this, the gamemaster can implement a -2 dice pool penalty with any conversation involving a creole where the speaker knows the base language, but not the specific creole.

TEEN YEARS

SHANGHAIED

In your youth you were conscripted onto a ship—whether fishing, cargo, smuggling, or pirate ship—and months or years of hard labor have taught you many aspects of ships' operations and life on the sea. You're accustomed to working long hours every day for months in many ship duties. You've gained experience as well as knowledge and occasionally share in the rewards.

ATTRIBUTES

Body +1, Strength +1

QUALITIES

Sense of Direction (p. 149, *Run Faster*)

SKILLS

Diving +1, Nautical Mechanic +1, Navigation +1, Swimming +2, Academic Knowledge: (Geography) +1

REAL LIFE

PIRATE CAPTAIN

No other criminal profession is as steeped in romantic fantasy as captain of a pirate ship. The reality is pragmatically mercenary. Not to mention difficult and dangerous. You have captured other ships, abducting passengers for ransom and seizing cargo to sell (sometimes back to the original owner), have smuggled cargo and people in and out of many ports, and earned the obedience and respect (if not always the loyalty) of your crew through flogging, keelhauling, and the occasional bonus.

ATTRIBUTES

Reaction +1, Willpower +1,

QUALITIES

Fame (4 Karma), Linguist

SKILLS

Diving +1, Gunnery +1, Intimidation +1, Leadership +1, Nautical Mechanic +2, Outdoors skill group +1, Pilot Watercraft +2, Swimming +2, Professional Knowledge: Watercraft +1, Street Knowledge: [Local area] Waterways +2

PIRATE CREWMEMBER

You may have stayed on with the ship after being shanghaied, or have been working your way through the ranks, hoping for your own ship and crew. Years of service onboard the ship have been difficult but beneficial as you move toward your goals.

ATTRIBUTES
Strength +1, Logic +1

SKILLS
Close Combat skill group +1, Gunnery +1, Lockpicking +1, Nautical Mechanic +2, Outdoors Skill Group +1, Pilot Watercraft +2, Secondary Language +2, Swimming +1, Pistols +1, Professional Knowledge: Knots +2, Street Knowledge: [Local area] Waterways +1

BOCOR SLAVE

For a time in your life, you were pushed into a magical prison of vodou. This may have been involuntary (captured, drugged, and sold to a disreputable bocor) or voluntary (indenturing yourself to the Zobop to pay off debts or atone for an offense). So for a time, you were a living zombie. Parts of your memory are a bit hazy, but the skills stuck.

ATTRIBUTES
Body +1, Strength +1, Agility +1, Logic +1

QUALITIES
Insomnia (10)

SKILLS
Armorer +1, Artisan +2, Automotive Mechanic +1, Close Combat skill group +1, Industrial Mechanic +1, Nautical Mechanic +1, Professional Knowledge: Buildings +2, Professional Knowledge: Construction +2, Professional Knowledge: Farming +2

VEHICLES

GROUNDCRAFT: COCOTAXI

HANDL	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEATS	AVAIL	COST
4/2	3	2	5	4	1	1	3	—	4,000¥

GROUNDCRAFT: CAMELLOS

HANDL	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEATS	AVAIL	COST
3/2	3	1	16	5	1	2	200	—	150,000¥

MÁQUINA CONVERSION

Any car can become a classic-looking car. Cost is (500 x Body) nuyen, and time is Body x 2 in days. Such a conversion gives the vehicle a distinct style and raises the base price of the vehicle by ten percent when selling.

ADVANCED LIFSTYLES

ADDITIONAL RULES

LIFESTYLES

(Ordered from low to high for determining if an entertainment costs nuyen and Quality requirement purposes.)*

- Street
- Squatter/Bolt Hole
- Low/Traveler
- Middle/Commercial
- High/Hospitalized
- Luxury

*Entertainment options that have Bolt Hole, Traveler, Commercialized, or Hospitalized for a minimum lifestyle are specific to the lifestyle. These options always cost money if applied to any other lifestyle.

LIFESTYLE CALCULATION ORDER*

This is the Lifestyle order calculation after *Run Faster*. Additional rules can apply.

- **Lifestyle categories** (C&N, S, N) are adjusted
- **Entertainment points are spent** for Assets and additional monthly costs are added
- **Add lifestyle qualities**
- **Add Shared Lifestyle adjustment** (if sharing a lifestyle)
- **Split** (if sharing a lifestyle)
- **Adjust share(s) for Dependents**
- **Adjust share(s) for metahuman lifestyle requirement**
- **Adjust for character augmentation** or quality lifestyle requirements
- **Entertainment points** for Outings and Services are added

*When incorporating a set of qualities or options that have both a percentage and a flat value, percentages do not apply to the flat value. Calculate percentages before adding flat values. For example, with the Lifestyle Option, if the character is adding Special Work Area (+1,000¥) and Dangerous Area (+20%), factor in Dangerous Area first, and then add Special Work Area.

STARTING NUYEN TABLE	
LIFESTYLE	STARTING NUYEN
Street/Bolt Hole	1D6 x 20¥
Squatter	2D6 x 40¥
Low/Traveler	3D6 x 60¥
Middle/Commercial	4D6 x 100¥
High	5D6 x 500¥
Luxury	6D6 x 1,000¥

SHARED ADVANCED LIFESTYLES

Each character that shares a residence (Team Lifestyle, p. 375, *SR5*) also adds an additional point available to the Lifestyle. A Lifestyle can gain up to twice the starting lifestyle points when taking lifestyle options or adding characters to share a lifestyle.

ENTERTAINMENT SPENDING

Points spent on entertainment assets are purchased once and shared by all characters of the shared Lifestyle. Any incurred costs by assets are added prior to the shared Lifestyle increase to represent the increased use/maintenance. Points remaining for outings and services are purchased per character, representing the character's individual habits. Benefits of individually purchased services only apply to the character: if they incur an additional cost, it is added to the character's share of the lifestyle cost, not divided among the group.

For example, if two characters share a middle lifestyle, they have 5 points to spend (4 +1 for the second character). If they spend 2 points on a gym and 2 points for a shooting range, then they both can use the gym and shooting range asset. The remaining 1 point can be spent differently for each character for only services and outings. One character may be a patron of the arts at sporting events, while the other character wants a pollution sensitive cleaning service. The monthly cost of the lifestyle is 6,050 nuyen (5,000 + 0 for the Gym + 500 for the shooting range x 10% for the team lifestyle). The cost is split at 3,025 nuyen a month per person, but character number two pays an additional 400 a month for cleaning service, so their monthly payment jumps to 3,425¥.

I RAN OUT OF POINTS, BUT WANT MORE STUFF

In order to get more out of your Lifestyle after you have used all of your points, you can purchase any outing or service for 0 points, but the monthly nuyen cost must be paid thereafter. You may purchase assets without points and just pay the monthly nuyen *only* if your chosen lifestyle is equal to or greater than the lifestyle requirement for the chosen asset. Merchandise assets cost 5,000 nuyen for eeach point after the first.

LIFESTYLE OPTIONS

GRID SUBSCRIPTION (UPDATED)

Nobody "downloads" or "records" their favorite song or movie anymore. Everything is purchased through the Matrix and stored virtually on a grid. Commlinks and home entertainment systems connect you wirelessly to everything from photos you've taken to corporate-sponsored lines of entertainment that you can watch whenever you want. Without a grid subscription, you might as well have a throwback commlink with an antique external storage device. Grid subscriptions are automatically available at some level depending on Lifestyle without spending points or cash:

Street: Public Grid
Squatter/Bolt Hole: Public Grid
Low/Traveler: Public Grid
Middle/Commercial: Public and Local Grid
High/Hospitalized: Public, Local, and a Global Grid
Luxury: Public, Local, and a Global Grid

GRID SUBSCRIPTION TABLE			
TYPE	POINTS	MONTHLY COST	MINIMUM LIFESTYLES
Local Grid	1	50	Middle
Global Grid	1	250	High

SUBSISTENCE HUNTING/ GATHERING

Points: 1-4
Type: Outing
Monthly Cost: 15 per point
Minimum Lifestyle: Squatter.

Whether it's dumpster diving and hunting rats in the city or gathering fruit and game from the wilds, Subsistence Hunting/Gathering allows the character to use his knowledge and skills to gather food and build up a long-

term larder (devil rat jerky anyone?). This goes beyond paying for groceries, farming, or panhandling.

Each month, the character can make a Survival Test, with a limit being the number of points put into Subsistence Farming/Hunting and a threshold being the base value of the Necessities lifestyle. No Edge can be applied for this test. Each net hit is added to the Necessities lifestyle for that month. A glitch reduces the Necessities Lifestyle by 1, and a critical glitch reduces it by 2, with a minimum of 0 in Necessities.

EXAMPLE

Drifter Pete has a Street lifestyle with C&N of 1 and spends two points in Subsistence Hunting/Gathering. This means that every month he can roll a Willpower + Survival [2](1) Test. Easily getting 3 hits, Pete adds the 2 net hits to his C&N of 1 and is living off bounty of fermenting soy and dried "street meat" for the month.

MANSERVANT/MAID

Many of the rich and famous employ servants to make their lives even easier. And to show off their wealth. Behind the scenes metahuman servants work in conjunction with automated devices to lay out clothes, clean up messes, or prepare meals, but are on display as silent tokens of their masters' wealth as they open doors, serve meals, or light cigars. The character who purchases this service has C&N rating in number of drones and/or people employed. These people are not contacts/mentors/etc., unless also purchased as such separately. Any test needed by these drones and/or people is limited to a dice pool of 6. Gamemasters may adjust dice pool for metatype attributes if applicable. Such servants can be of assistance for extended tests the character does at the home. Note that Security Personnel are handled through the Security attribute.

Unique to the Caribbean is the use of zombies instead of servants. They are purchased from the Zobop for menial labor force. Pricing includes the care and maintenance of them until the magic wears off; they make a great conversational piece. Note that outside the Caribbean League, such practice is considered illegal.

MAID/MANSERVANT

TYPE	POINTS	MONTHLY COST	MINIMUM LIFESTYLES
Drone	1	7,000	High
Manservants/ Maids	2	15,000	Luxury
Zombies	2	20,000	High

LIFESTYLE QUALITIES

DUG A HOLE

(POSITIVE QUALITY)

For Bolt Holes only. People would believe you fell off the face of the earth while using the bolt hole. It is so remote or obscure that a tactical nuke in the general area would be a better alternative to finding you. Add an additional +2 to the threshold of any test for tracking a character who is living in the bolt hole. +2,000¥

HOUSEHOLD GREMLINS

(NEGATIVE QUALITY)

While the house looks nice, it constantly needs attention. One week the roof leaks, the next the air conditioner fails or maybe a power circuit develops a short. Every month the game master rolls 1D6. If it's a hit, something falls apart at the home, reducing the C&N of the lifestyle for that month. At level 1, reduce the C&N for that month by 1; at level 2, reduce C&N by 2. Lifestyle must have a C&N equal to or greater than what the Household Gremlin can reduce. Subtract 300 from the lifestyle cost for level 1, 600 for level 2.

LAX SECURITY

(NEGATIVE QUALITY)

Things are not up to code, up to date, or up to the task in regards to protecting your property, but you got a great deal when you purchased it ... five years ago. Reduce the security threshold by 1. Reduce the security's dice pool by 1. Add 1 point to the base Lifestyle.

LIMITED BUILDING SPACE

(NEGATIVE QUALITY)

The number of people who can live in your residence is strictly limited—whether due to physical space or any other reason. Things are abnormally close. Occupancy is limited to the number of roommates; no guests. If occupancy is above the set number, reduce the dice pool of any skill test done in the residence by 1 per person over the limit. Add 1 point to the base Lifestyle.

NO MASTERS

(NEGATIVE QUALITY)

You live with members of a group that rebels against any form of control or dominion. Neo-anarchists are the most common example. In exchange for anonymity and a place to stay, you are required to help the community. Character cannot have a Corporate or Limited Corporate SIN. This option also cannot be combined with Corporate Owned. Reduce Lifestyle cost by ten percent.

ROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD

(NEGATIVE QUALITY)

The home is in an area that is stereotypically crime-ridden or is on the virtual border of the applied security lev-

el. Gangs are more active, people are more aggressive, and even in full daylight no one steps onto the street without protection. Reduce neighborhood level by 1. Add 1 point to the base Lifestyle.

LIFESTYLE EXAMPLES

PERSONAL OUBLIETTE

(BOLTHOLE)

In the midst of the crumbling old buildings you have a reinforced stone prison, buried under centuries of urban construction. Sure it's a difficult crawl through the rubble to reach it, but its inaccessibility is part of its charm. As are the bouquet of stenches that keep causal explorers at bay. With a grow light and a composting toilet, it's the perfect sanctuary. If you ever feel the need to talk, the skeleton in the corner is a great listener.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 2
- **Security:** 2
- **Neighborhood:** 1
- **Entertainment Assets:** Indoor Arboretum
- **Options:** Dug a Hole, Not a Home
- **Points:** 0
- **Cost:** 3,700 ¥

BEACH BUM (STREET)

No one bothers you sleeping on the beach, and when the weather's nice you have no trouble blending with the tourists and locals crowding the sand. Potable water's no problem with regularly spaced showers, water fountains, and restrooms. On good days, there's enough party trash to trade in for food and drugs. On bad days, you'll find yourself digging for coquinas, scraping mussels off the docks, and trapping sea gulls for food.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 1
- **Security:** 0
- **Neighborhood:** 1
- **Entertainment Assets:** Swimming Pool (Ocean), Private Room, Subsistence Hunting/Gathering 4
- **Options:** Angry Drunk, Obscure/Difficult to Find
- **Points:** 0
- **Cost:** 160¥ a month

GONE NATIVE (STREET)

You have given up the urban jungle for the real thing. You hunt wild game and gather edible fruits and roots. You string a hammock to sleep above the critters at night. When it rains you have to throw a tarp over anything you own to keep it dry while you take a shower.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 0
- **Security:** 1
- **Neighborhood:** 0
- **Entertainment Assets:** Private Room, Yard, Subsistence Hunting/Gathering 4
- **Options:** Obscure/Difficult to Find, W Zone
- **Points:** 1
- **Cost:** 60¥ a month

HAVANA TUNNEL COFFIN MOTEL

(SQUATTER)

A tunnel coffin motel is a made up of boxes—two meters long and a meter wide and tall—stacked four high in the Havana Tunnel. There is a thin foam mattress for a floor, the box can be locked from the inside, and it's lit by light strips, the sickly yellow glow hiding a multitude of stains. The walls are barely thick enough to muffle the noise of the traffic a dozen centimeters beyond the back of the box. The only amenity, other than the lock and light strip, is a port to connect your commlink if you're willing to take the security risk.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 1
- **Security:** 2
- **Neighborhood:** 2
- **Entertainment Assets:**
- **Options:** Limited Building Space, Maid is Out
- **Points:** 2
- **Cost:** 600 ¥ a month

GUACHINANGO BARRENS RESIDENT

(SQUATTER)

On the Guachinango River, you have cobbled together a shack able to keep most of the rain and wind out using scrap lumber, bricks, and anything else that came to hand from the ruins of suburbia. A raised cot keeps you out of the mud, but holding crawling bugs at bay requires constant vigilance. Nothing distinguishes one hovel from another, there are no streets or numbers. The river is the communal sewer, making the search for potable water—or even water safe to bathe in—a challenge.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 2
- **Security:** 1
- **Neighborhood:** 1
- **Entertainment Assets:** Zen Den, Yard, Swimming pool (River)
- **Options:** W Zone, Rough Neighborhood, Obscure/Difficult to Find
- **Points:** 0
- **Cost:** 800 ¥ a month

CHINATOWN RESIDENT (LOW)

You've found yourself a home of crumbling concrete and fading paint on Galido Street, in the heart of Chinatown. The water for the toilet and washing isn't potable—drinking water is available only from a government dispensary on the ground floor. Appliances are all well used and in more or less working order. Cables are strung along the walls and through slatted windows to power lights, trideo, and whatever else you have more often than not. To secure your scooter, you park it where your dining table should be. Essential upgrade: Add your own deadbolt(s) to the door.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 3

- **Security:** 3
- **Neighborhood:** 2
- **Entertainment Assets:** Private Room, Railway Pass (Havanna to Marcial)
- **Options:** Rough Neighborhood
- **Points:** 2
- **Cost:** 2,475 ¥ a month

VEDADO RESIDENT

(MIDDLE)

Modest apartments of colonial architecture squeezed between more modern condos and government stores. It's small, but comfortable. All the facilities work, the neighborhood is clean and safe, and you have an easy walk to the bus stop for work.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 4
- **Security:** 3
- **Neighborhood:** 5
- **Entertainment Assets:** Patron of the Arts (Revolution Square [Theme park]), Public Transportation (Havana)
- **Options:** None
- **Points:** 0
- **Cost:** 6,600 ¥ a month

ZOÉ CITIZEN RESIDENCE, OLD HAVANA

(HIGH)

As a Zoé Citizen, you live in the residential condos in Old Havana's city of columns. The large windows give you a view of Havana's streets between the façade of columns that give the neighborhood its name. The exterior of your building conforms to neoclassical design, but every condo is state of the art—from entertainment systems to kitchen to VR office if you want to work from home. All wireless flows through Zoé's secure grid.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 5[7]
- **Security:** 5[7]
- **Neighborhood:** 5[6]
- **Entertainment Assets:** Armory, Patron of the Arts (Private Club), Private Room, Soy Processing Unit
- **Options:** Corporate Owned
- **Points:** 0
- **Cost:** 10,240 ¥ a month

LIFE ON THE HIGH SEAS

(TRAVELER)

Sure, there are times when work forces you to port, but left on your own you let the wind carry you where it will and spend your nights under the stars far from the light pollution of metahuman habitation. The ocean is your source for both energy and tranquility.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 2[4]
- **Security:** 2[4]
- **Neighborhood:** 2[4]
- **Entertainment Assets:** Garage (Dock), Shooting Range
- **Options:** Obscure/Difficult to Find, One Good Thing about this Place (Shooting Range)
- **Points:** 1D6
- **Cost:** 5,500 ¥ a month

TOBACCO PLANTATION

(COMMERCIAL)

The Arroyo Naranjo hotel is a tobacco plantation enclosed in a prefabricated government greenhouse. The Arroyo Naranjo does not use the drones you would expect to tend the plants and harvest the tobacco, nor does the plantation employ metahuman servants to look after the labor-intensive crops. They reason that drones can be hacked and that laborers can be bribed or threatened, making both potential security risks. Instead, they went with the obvious choice: zombies. While zombies require closer supervision and more care than either drones or metahumans, they can never be turned against you.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 3
- **Security:** 3
- **Neighborhood:** 4
- **Entertainment Assets:** Green House, Merchandise Goods (Tobacco [2pts]), Zombie Servants
- **Options:** Not a Home
- **Points:** 0
- **Cost:** 43,500 ¥ a month

HOTEL NACIONAL

(LUXURY)

To stay at the Hotel Nacional, you must be somebody. Or, at the very least, part of the Family. The most basic rooms are meticulous recreations of 1920s Mafia chic, while the opulence of the premium suites is limited only by your imagination. Amenities include a swimming complex with everything from hot springs to polar pools, bars, and restaurants ranging from Prohibition-era speakeasies to 1950s Havana casinos, and gyms offering everything from personal yoga to MMA fights. The concierge office is ready for any request. The Hotel Nacional's only rule is unbreakable: Do not bring your business with you.

- **Comforts & Necessities:** 7
- **Security:** 8
- **Neighborhood:** 5
- **Entertainment Assets:** Armory, Discreet Cleaning Service, Discreet Candyman Service, Gym, Sports Court (Basketball), Swimming Pool, Walk-in Freezer
- **Options:** None
- **Points:** 1
- **Cost:** 152,800 ¥ a month

CHAMELEON

"So, Joshua, based on your professional experience, what should I do with my Ares stock? Buy or sell?" asked Maria Thornwood as she dined with Joshua Stanton at the Pearl of the Sea lounge in Downtown Manhattan.

To his friends, the thirty-three year old Joshua Stanton was a run-of-the-mill investment banker working for a prestigious financial firm in the heart of Manhattan. As far as they knew, he had been working at that firm for five years and had earned a sizable fortune playing the East Coast Stock Exchange. He didn't let them know, of course, that his work k as an investment banker was a cover, a dodge— a ruse to hide activities a lot worse than insider trading.

"Sell," Stanton said. "Yes, I am aware Ares' profits are up marginally for the year. I know they just acquired a new company for Ares Global worth two billion nuyen. But there is still so much instability within Ares itself. Knight and Vogel are still at each other's throats. Their infighting is becoming more public, and it's going to hurt the corp, long-term. I say get out of Ares stock before things accelerate downhill even faster."

"Where should we be investing instead?" asked Vincent Trenton. He kept an aloof, ironic note in his voice, probably to avoid the hint of panic likely making his stomach do backflips.

Stanton took a sip of his wine to make his reply appear measured. "Genetique, Universal Omnitech, Pensodyne. Companies specializing in gene therapies or nanotech. Yes, all stocks in those fields are at record lows due to this 'head crash' virus. Yes, the virus has investors scared, and I know of hundreds of investors who have lost entire fortunes due to the collapse of this sector. But at the end of the day, the head crash virus is only a temporary phenomenon. I predict things will stabilize, and then the corporations will be back on track with their research and development for new technologies. While the head crash virus is a passing anomaly, the general population's need to look and feel eternally young and vital will never go away. There are a lot of good bargains out there right now because of this scare, and your portfolios will benefit tremendously from taking the plunge into these stocks today, when prices are so low. Take the risk while you can. You'll be thanking me in a few years. Just avoid anything Evo or NeoNET related. They'll be among the last to recover from." As Stanton was talking, a message came into his commlink, forcing an ARO open in his line of vision. "I'm sorry, my friends. Important message from work. I need to answer this. Please excuse me."

Stanton politely excused himself from the table and walked out into the lobby to check the message. It was coming in on his burner 'link, which increased the chance that it was important. It was gobbledygook, of course, but it turned into language once he ran it through his decipher algorithm.

BY MICHAEL WICH

<Operative: Chameleon. New job: NeoNET executive Marshall Grimes, Genetics Division. 52 yrs old, lives in NeoNET residential arcology, Riverside, unit 60228. No family. Location is provided in attached document. Termination must happen within 72 hours, must be attributable to natural causes. Pay is 250,000 NeoNET corp scrip. Accept Y/N?>

Stanton grimaced. He understood well how currency exchanges worked, even if he wasn't really an investment banker. Currently, NeoNET's corp scrip was valued at 68 cents to a single nuyen. So the offer was one hundred and seventy thousand nuyen. Not enough.

<Payment needs to be made in nuyen or no deal.> Stanton replied.

After a couple of minutes, he received his response. <Agreed. >

The young assassin looked at the rest of the details of the assignment. Seventy-two fragging hours doesn't allow for a lot of prep time. But it would be enough. He clicked the ARO in the message to confirm he would accept the job. Returning to the table, Stanton apologized to his friends that he had to leave, with an excuse that a major account was looking to leave the firm, and he would have to engage in some last minute damage control. He paid for his friends' dinner to make up for his abrupt departure and left.

First things first: Get intel. He needed to learn more about the mark, find the info his employer inevitably was hiding from him, and figure out why they wanted Marshall Grimes dead. It wasn't merely about satisfying his curiosity—it was about anticipating potential complications and being in the position to overcome them.

It only took a few hours to learn from his contacts inside NeoNET security that Grimes was, in their terms, a 'rat-faced, no-good whistleblower.' NeoNET's internal security had identified him in the last two days as being the source of leaked sensitive reports and materials to the media; internal reports that drastically contradicted NeoNET's public relations narrative to downplay the extent of the cognitive fragmentation disorder virus' spread through their nanotech and genetech products, and reports that contradicted their claims that they were just a few months away from discovering a cure. These leaks were costing the corporation hundreds of millions of nuyen in lost revenue with each new devastating release and were causing serious harm to NeoNET's reputation. And from what Stanton found, those who had ordered the hit didn't wish for Grimes to be publicly exposed as a whistleblower in

a very public arrest that would end up turning him into some sort of heroic crusader for the masses. They just wanted him shut up for good, and to have it done as quietly as possible. In this light, Stanton knew the two hundred and fifty thousand nuyen they were offering to take out Grimes would be seen as a bargain in comparison to what Grimes was costing NeoNET with his leaks. That was good—if he played his cards right and did exactly as the employer asked of him, the chances of blowback on him or a double cross from his employer would be extremely low. He knew how to do the job in a way that would keep the employer happy, which wouldn't hurt..

After learning the background of his target, Joshua contacted his decker, Brute Force. There was a lot of material he would need in order to get in and out of the sixty-five-story Riverside arcology without detection. He would need a copy of Grimes' SIN and all the biometric data attached to it, including his fingerprints, retina scans, and DNA profile. Grimes had recently installed two state-of-the-art biometric locks on his apartment door inside the arcology in addition to the keypad lock that was standard on NeoNET apartment doors. That level of paranoia only confirmed to Stanton that he had something to hide. Stanton also knew he would need a voice print from Grimes in the event he needed to talk to any of his neighbors along his route to the apartment. He would also need the target's schedule for the next thirty-five hours to be able to get into Grimes' apartment while he wasn't home.

While requesting this data on Grimes, Stanton also asked his decker to get a copy of a SIN, a biometric profile, and voice print for one of the security guards assigned to work inside the arcology, ideally a guard scheduled to be off at the time he was to pull off this job. This identity would get him into the arcology. Stanton also requested that it be a guard that might not be as well known to building security, preferably one that had only been working there for six months or less, decreasing the chance of running into someone who knew the guard's habits or routines. He also requested a layout of the building. Stanton then contacted his fixer to acquire an authentic-looking uniform to impersonate the NeoNET guard and two fake SINs; one to mirror his mark's SIN, and one to mirror the guard's SIN. This list would eventually cost Stanton a total of fifteen thousand nuyen to obtain. With his plans set into motion, Stanton was forced to wait on his fixer and his decker to provide him with their paydata and goods before moving onto the next step, while he watched the clock. He had only had sixty more hours to take out his target.

Six hours had passed before Brute Force had the SIN and biometric data delivered to Stanton on the two targets: Grimes and another man named Jeremy Hawkes, a NeoNET guard who had only been with the corporation for three months. After sharing the SIN information with his fixer, Stanton worked on programming the cutter nanites he would use for this job. While many in his profession were veering away from the use of nanites in general, fearing accidental infection by the dreaded CFD virus, he had no such fears. He did not believe the virus would spread to cutter nanites that were designed to kill the very thing that the virus would need to act as a host. He also knew that the source of the cutters he used were clean, as the people he's worked with for the last five years have proven to be quite reputable. If they said the nanites were selling were safe and reliable, he believed them. And what he found most desirable about these particular nanites was that he could lace an entire apartment with them, and they would only become active when they made contact with the assigned DNA profile. Otherwise, they would remain inert. Such a precise weapon—one that would leave family members and visitors unharmed—was one too valuable to give up based on unfounded fears.

Once he had finished programming the nanites to recognize Grimes' DNA profile, he loaded them up into two aerosol cans disguised as body spray. He tucked them away inside a duffle bag, which held gym wear and an extra set of casual clothes.

At the forty-six hour mark, the uniform that Stanton wanted arrived from his fixer. He checked it to make certain every detail was accurate, matching its appearance to Hawkes' service record. Then he set about programming the fingerprint patterns from both Grimes and Hawkes into a sheet of memory material capable of reproducing the finger and palm prints as three-dimensional molds that could produce patterns he could mimic though the use of his adept abilities. Once the sheet of memory material was programmed, he folded it up and slid it into a hidden compartment built into his custom-designed commlink. He then loaded his fake SINs onto his commlink and was ready to go.

With everything in order, the only thing left to do before morning was get a good sleep.

Stanton rode the subway to Riverside on the Manhattan Island at 1130 hours, wearing the fake NeoNET uniform, and dressed as Officer Hawkes. Walking into the restroom for the subway station, Stanton entered an empty stall and closed the door. Minutes ticked by as Stanton closed his eyes and channeled mana into reshaping his face. The cartilage of his ears extended, forming points at the end from where they used to be round. He changed his eyes, shifting them from their natural green to brown. His curly black hair straightened and became blond. His facial structure slowly elongated, matching the image of Jeremy Hawkes precisely. Stanton then listened to Hawkes' voice print and channeled mana into his body again, altering his vocal cords until he could speak exactly like Hawkes. Once that was done, he removed the memory material from his commlink and activated it, creating a mold of Hawkes' finger and palm prints. Finally he shifted the fingerprints and palm print on his right hand to match Hawkes' prints.

Once the transformation was complete, Stanton walked out of the subway station as Officer Hawkes and approached the three NeoNET guards watching the street entrance of the arcology. Stanton waited in line as the security guards

checked SINs, passes, and possessions of the people entering the arcology.

As Stanton stepped up to have his palm prints read by the guards, the guard in charge at the checkpoint asked, "Hawkes. Are you supposed to be here? I thought you were off today?"

"I got a last-minute call from Metahuman Resources telling me I needed to cover another guard's shift," Stanton replied in Hawkes' voice, placing his right palm on the scanner. A second guard confirmed Hawkes' identity, verifying both palm and voiceprints and giving the supervisory guard an all-clear sign.

"Strange. I don't see you on the schedule."

Stanton sighed in frustration. "I'll go up to M.R. and have a chat with them. If there was a fuck up and I'm not scheduled, I'll just make use of the gym while I'm here and go home. Dammit. Could've used the extra cash."

"I hear you. An extra shift would be nice right about now." After the third security guard inspected the duffle bag and cleared it, the guard-in-charge let Stanton through the checkpoint. He walked toward the nearest elevator in the lobby and entered. Although he suspected the guards would not follow up and check his route though the arcology on the security cameras, he had to be certain. Instead of hitting the button for the sixtieth floor and making a direct route for his target's apartment, he hit the button for the thirty-sixth floor, where the Metahuman Resources office was located. Stanton made a point of heading toward the office, just like he'd said he would do. By the time he approached the office, he was certain that if the guards were watching him, they would have by this point turned their attention to other matters. He changed course again and headed toward a restroom near Metahuman Resources, where he would change his disguise again, this time going from the appearance of the thirty-two-year-old blond elf to the silver-haired, middle-aged human in the Genetics Division. Switching the SINs he was broadcasting to that of Grimes and dressed in the casual business attire, Stanton walked out of the restroom and headed for the sixtieth floor.

Everything stayed steady as Stanton got off the elevator. No one was rushing up to try to detain him or trying to track his movements. As such, Stanton continued to play the part of the geneticist, as he headed toward his mark's apartment. Nearly at the noon hour, most of the hallways in the residential area of the arcology were deserted. Most residents were still at work or in NeoNET's various corporate-run schools. And he knew Grimes was in a meeting at the Malmstein building in Midtown, and he wouldn't be back to the arcology until later that evening. Stanton smiled a little to himself, grateful that he had successfully infiltrated the arcology.

Getting into Grimes' apartment would be child's play. He used his adept abilities to mimic Grimes' prints and bypass the biometric locks. Once inside the two-bedroom apartment, Stanton started memorizing his surroundings using his three-dimensional memory power. Everything he touched or tagged with the nanites had to be put back in the exact same spot; nothing could be out of place. In Grimes' paranoid state, he might do something unpredictable, such as flee the apartment. Such a rash action could prevent Grimes from being saturated with the nanites, making the mission fail. That would be a hit to the Chameleon's reputation that Stanton would not tolerate.

Methodically, Stanton applied his cutter nanites to surfaces he was certain Grimes would touch. He applied the nanites to the refrigerator handle, to the kitchen and sink facet handles, to the shower door, to the sheets and pillow covers of Grimes' bed, to many of the plates and glasses inside the kitchen cabinets, and the sofa inside the living room. Once Stanton had used both cans of the nanites, he left.

Most shadowrunners would have made a beeline for the exit once the job was done. And he could have done so, likely without tipping anyone off, but he still had a cover to maintain. Once again assuming the disguise of Jeremy Hawkes, complete with gym wear, he hit the gymnasium on the sixteenth floor. He exercised there for an hour, watching his surroundings and other people's reactions to him while looking casual and relaxed. Once he was done, he grabbed his duffle bag and left the arcology, waving to the guards at the main entrance as he departed. The guards paid no attention to him; nothing about him was what it shouldn't be. He took his time leaving the area, making sure he changed subway lines multiple times, shaking any tail jobs that might have been attempted. Then he returned home to wait for the results of his work.

He had to wait an entire day. His NeoNET contacts reported that Grimes' body was discovered in his apartment at 0920 hours by arcology security, after he failed to not report to work. The discovery was well within the mandated seventy-two-hour time frame. Using his contacts, Stanton reached out to the NeoNET medical examiner who would autopsy Grimes, and paying her 5,000 nuyen to insure that the outcome of the autopsy would be "Natural Causes, Aortic Aneurism." When the autopsy report came out, Stanton got a copy to make sure the medical examiner lived up to her end of the deal.

In the end, Marshall Grimes was written off as a fluke, an inherent condition in his heart combining with the stress of his job to finish him off. Any leaks he had been causing were plugged. Knowing that whoever had hired him services probably also had a copy of the autopsy report, Stanton checked his bank account. Sure enough, the two hundred and fifty thousand nuyen had been deposited. He promptly pulled the money out of that account, moving it into a more secure Zurich Orbital account. He then invested the other half into stocks—Universal Omnitech and Designer Genes.

BECOMING DEATH

POSTED BY: BLACKWING

If you're reading this, there's a strong possibility you are a murderer.

Oh, don't look so shocked. Most shadow ops came from professions where they were trained to do it, while others came up from the streets, where it's a way of life. And for the would-be freelance assassin, morality isn't generally the first concern. Fanatics and vigilantes can cover that ground. You came here to get paid, and there's a reason they call it blood money. The more you spill, the better business it is, and business is booming.

Ready to get your hands wet?

For those of you who do not know who I am, I was once known as Blackwing. The consummate elven hitman. Deadshot, executioner, agent provocateur.

To those who do know me: You missed.

I've been a contractor for independents, the Tír governments, and for myself. I have tracked, sabotaged and killed most of the things people pay to see dead in the Sixth World. Men, monsters, dragons, and much stranger things I can't explain . And that work has left me very, very well-off. These days, my star has passed into legend. I'm living the quiet life, wealthy and independent, with a family to look after and hobbies to maintain. And the picturesque vision of my life was made possible with blood money.

- Bull. Drek. Blackwing, a.k.a. Prince Evan Parris, is a Tir Tairngire high noble, and has his fingers in more than a few pies. He might not be the one pulling the trigger, anymore, but you can bet he has only the best doing his dirty work for him. He's not out of the game, he's just playing at a higher level.
- Snopes

- He's not kidding. In his day, Blackwing could pull down more nuyen with a single bullet than most runner teams could get with an entire extraction. The '50s were littered with wannabe elven hitmen who idolized him and envied his reputation. Well, littered with their corpses, anyway. Wetwork isn't for amatuers.
- Bull

- Don't think he didn't know it. I know of at least one case where some young up-and-comer took the fall for a hit he performed. Sometimes it pays to have a fan following.
- Balladeer

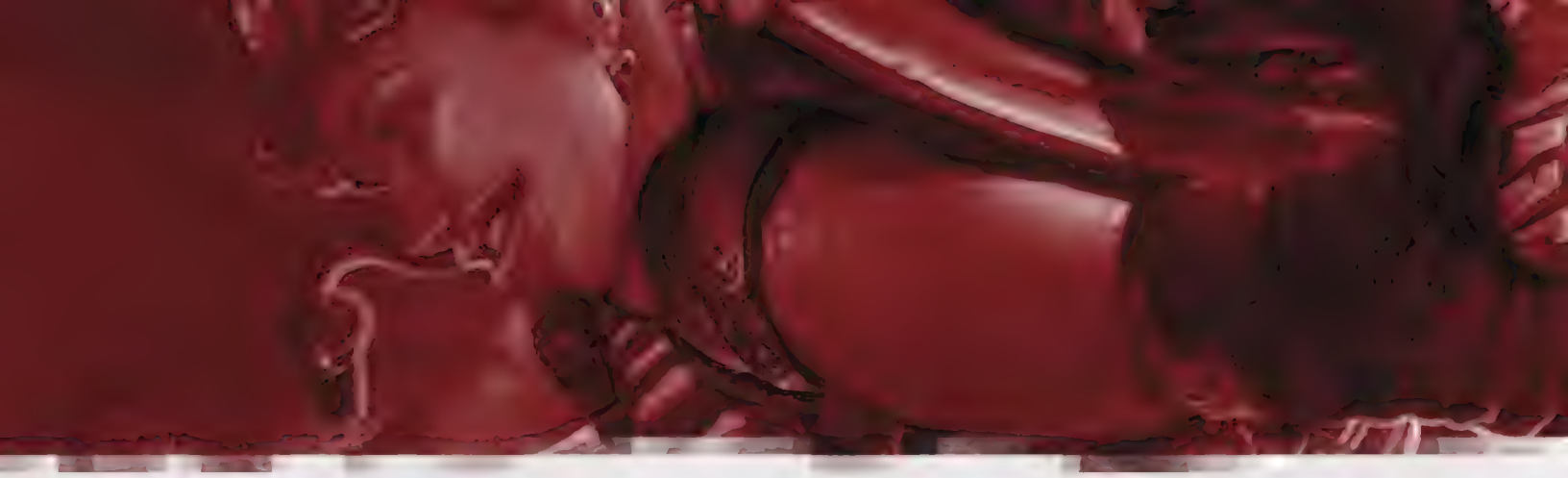
- Blackwing has cycled through teams throughout the years, but his two longest-running partners were Cillian Nightprince and Rhiannon. Cillian ran with Blackwing in the early '50s, providing the magic to match his muscle. Nobody knows where Nightprince went off to (the rumor mill ran wild speculating if he was dead, retired, or a million other fates), but Parris's next partner would end up being for life. Rhiannon and Parris got married, making them one of the deadliest couples in the Sixth World. She is a combat mage par excellence, and the tactics they devised evolved on the early models Blackwing established with Nightprince. They were close to untouchable.
- Icarus

- Don't think retirement means he's let the chops rust. I have it on good authority that he keeps his deltaware updated to the bleeding-edge, and he runs his exercises as hard as he ever has. Even if you stripped away all that money and all those bodyguards, I wouldn't accept a contract on him for all a dragon's gold.
- DangerSensei

- His bodyguards are something else, too. Each one handpicked and financed, fanatical, well-paid and -equipped.
- Kia

- Blackwing has never had much luck with the many dragons whose paths he crosses. Perianwyr and Eliohann caused him trouble, and with Geyswain he needed the help of some runners, Lone Star, and Arleesh to close the deal.
- Frosty

- Kyle Morgan is gone, isn't he?
- Blackwing



- Wait, are you saying that since you couldn't take out a dragon, you went for his partner, instead?
- Snopes

- No way. No goddamn way.
- Bull

- You might think so. I couldn't possibly comment.
- Blackwing

KILLERS BORN AND MADE

ORIGINS

Don't think for a minute you are an assassin because you are a killer. That's just an ingredient. An assassin sets out with a goal of killing someone specific. You can gun down all the rent-a-cops at a facility you want. That makes you a goon. You set out to zero a mark, plan a whole op based around their death, and execute the task. That is an assassin. No prisoners. A killer does not an assassin make. But it's a start.

Anyone can fall into the life. Anyone who has the opportunity, anyway. Staying in requires a talent for death. Truth be told, it doesn't take very much skill to kill another metahuman. Right now, there are probably fifty people around you who you could murder, even if you weren't a runner. What is stopping them? And what's stopping you?

Everyone has a limit. Everyone has a price. If your limit is low enough, if your price can be met, then you're willing to kill someone. So what is your price?

If the price comes in terms of nuyen, rather than honor or some other abstract concept, you've got the right mindset. An assassin is out to serve a cause of one brand or another, most famously the fattening of their credstick.

Let me start from the top down. The best killers, on average, are former government and megacorp ops. Black on black, trained by the best, becoming sharper with every generation. When they go freelance, it usually means they were blacklisted. If they get away, that's already proof of their skill. And their hunger. Hunted by the powers they once served, they have to use their skills to buy their way to safety. Some turn to standard shadowrunning, but there's better money in kick art, and they can handle the heat. Plus, they're the most likely to have cutting-edge cyberware. They represent a standard of professionalism you almost can't find anywhere else: top-line talent blended with paranoid motivation.

- Personal bias. Before Blackwing started playing Tír politics as a noble, he worked black ops for the Star Chamber.
- Frosty

- Whereas now he's a member who runs the black ops. Guess there really is no limit to what you can achieve when you're an elf in the Tír, huh?
- Thorn

A step down is the daytripper. You can split these into two schools: the shadow op who sidelines into assassination now and again, and the specialist who is only called in for specific jobs. A sideliner doesn't have the kind of reputation to back up regular work, but that can help, since no one sees them coming, and their skillset can give them the edge in approaching a job from a new angle. The specialist, on the other hand, builds their career around a specific kind of hit. Nostro, a German dwarf, specializes in accidents that involve the mark vanishing. No corpse, no trace. They just poof off the map, forever. Ivchenko, before he got taken down in the '60s, used blood magic to do terror jobs. Ire did the same, come to think of it. Bluebeard only does women. One of my personal favorites is Marisol, who works exclusively in hotels. Any kind of hit, but only if it takes place in a hotel. That cracks me up. She does very well for herself.

- This suggests that you see shadowrunners as less impressive than assassins. Am I misreading the tone?
- Slamm-0!

- Are dedicated assassins better at deathdealing than shadowrunners? Yes, very often. I'm sure anyone who specializes in one type of work is better at that

exclusive area of expertise than those who cross-train. But shadowrunning is a fantastic way to build the skills that help in wetwork, especially considering how often assassins choose to work alone.

- Blackwing

- And no one said it can't work the other way, either. Assassins may be called in to do other shadow ops, sometimes for the reputation, other times because they have the guaranteed talent to create a final solution to obstacles.
- Red

- Or because they are in someone's pocket, and they aren't given a choice.
- Blackwing.

- Ahhh. I always wondered why you were after that statue ...
- Red

- Wait, you too?
- Elijah

The bottom rung are the street-level hitters. The normal image is the gutterpunk who shivs someone for fifty nuyen or a hit of betameth. Some regular assassins get their start down there, carrying off small jobs and working their way from hustling for drug dealers and insurance scammers to the midrange. Some few have the right outlook; they start learning all the tricks and angles of the trade as they go, from the ground up. These ones, if they survive, can become exceptionally skilled. The dark side is that they often carry some baggage with them, often without knowing it. What's more, lots of these little fish get pulled into the mob, stuck in the limbo where they can never leave, but never advance. Not the worst work, if you can get it, but you'll never do any other kind for the rest of your life.

- Again, Blackwing's arrogance makes him dismiss certain elements. A lot of hitmen aren't recruited or loaned out of military service and trained to be killers by an agency. In fact, most assassins begin at the lower levels. He's right that many of them become attached to criminal families, but that doesn't mean they can't advance.
- Red Anya

- Plenty of hitters for the Mob are the ones advancing. Remember Don Biggio in Seattle?
- Sunshine

- How do assassins get recruited out of the army, anyway?
- Chainmaker

- More often than not it's a matter of moral flexibility. In-depth psychological profiles and observation by recruiters during and after boot camp isolate candidates for advanced training. Natural talent isn't a necessity, as skills can be wired or trained, and there are enough ways of killing a metahuman that almost anyone fit to be a soldier can be made to be an assassin.
- Fianchetto

- He's right, though they're willing to make exceptions regarding inherent psychological adaptation if the potential recruit is extraordinarily gifted at what they do. If you've got a sniper in the Green Berets who can move and shoot like a ghost, they'll find work for you. Depending on the individual, this can include a lot of selective crafting of circumstances. Some soldiers find themselves under a kind of media filter, propaganda boosting their patriotism along with their hatred of projected enemies. Others are kept in the dark or lied to. This is avoided as much as possible, given the risk of unforeseen factors compromising the op or, worse, an asset going rogue.
- Thorn

- Why not just pop a chip and make the perfect killer in a can?
- Turbo Bunny

- Lack of operational flexibility. A chip can make a fine factory worker, and under the right circumstances even a clumsy sleeper agent can get the job done, but an assassin needs to be able to adapt and think on their feet, and a personafix can only do so much in the face of so many variables and stimuli.
- Fianchetto

- Slaves make poor assassins of anyone but their masters.
- Man-of-Many-Names

KILLER TRAITS

The sharpest blades are forged from the finest metals. So it goes with trained killers. While they have been known to spring from almost every conceivable background, when the powers that be go looking for a potential agent to groom into a long-term assassin, there are certain personality traits that tend to make for better results. Among these are:

- The ability to compartmentalize emotions
- Empathetic detachment
- High anxiety threshold
- High aggression threshold
- Lack of violence threshold
- Greed, but not ambition
- Solitary nature
- Capacity for blending in
- Ease with deception
- Self-sufficiency

- I believe I cover that later.
- Blackwing

MORALITY

There is a popular trope of the "noble assassin" in the sims. The one who only kills really bad people who deserve to die, or at least has a change of heart before killing a living saint.

It's about ninety-eight percent bull.

- Hey, Bull, I-
- Slamm-0!

- It's not funny enough to bother finishing the joke, is it?
- Bull

- ...no. No it isn't.
- Slamm-0!

Most people who are assassins are creatures of infinite justification. They know there are other assassins out there who will take the job if they don't. A death mark is just someone's number being up. One way or another, a kick artist is going to make a kill and collect the bill. Might as well be them.

That remaining two percent? Killers with a heart of gold, or so they tell themselves. "Only really bad people," they say, and they go after the hard targets: criminals, protected corpers, corrupt cops, made men, metahuman traffickers, etc. And they end up dead pretty quick. Because those targets have friends who are linked into the same community as the hitman, and they are

NOTABLE HITMEN IN THE SIXTH WORLD

Clean Steve: Notable for having no augmentations or supernatural edges, Steve is at the top of his game with pure training and talent. He keeps himself in superb shape and is a master of tactics and setups. He wins by controlling the field of battle and is more than a match for many technically superior foes. In the twentieth century he'd have been the best. He's not against using a team, and in his old (leónized) age, he's more likely to run overwatch for a team of killers. He adapts quickly, always has at least three backup plans, always cleans his tracks, and never gets cruel. A consummate professional.

Nightprince: A subject of considerable mystery in the shadow community, Nightprince was once Blackwing's partner in the 2040s. All that is known is that he was an elf, Awakened, and had a talent for expeditious, subtle killings. Many of his jobs were political in nature, lending credence to the popular theory that both he and Blackwing were agents of a Tir government.

Bluebeard: Applying social skills to get close to a mark, Bluebeard is an utter lothario. He exclusively takes contracts on women, seducing them and killing them after a night of passion. Bluebeard may have magic or bioware to eliminate any biological markers after the fact, because no DNA traces have ever been left. A bastard, but who isn't in this business?

Sandman: The Sandman may be a man or a woman—no one knows for sure. All the kills are by poison, inducing a painless death while the target sleeps. Sandman signs all their kills with the calling card, "Sweet Dreams" near the body, and assuming that card has been left at all their kills, there have been fifty-four in total, including NeoNET Boston Regional Director Katja Sims.

Eidoloclast: E is a fanatic, but with one eye on the credstick. He specifically targets high-profile marks, with a preference for corporate, celebrity, and especially religious backgrounds. E has plenty of bounties out for him, but it is doubtful they are going to slow him down.

Echo: Considered a talented amateur, Echo only operates behind the anonymity of a drone. Favoring a heavily modified Mitsuhama Akiyama wrapped in a ruthenium polymer cloak, the assassin remains mostly mysterious. The most outlandish claim Echo is an AI, a technomancer, or a teenager.

- For the sake of allaying some mysteries, I will say that Nightprince stopped working with me right before my encounter with Geyswain. He said he felt something dark coming, and refused to say more about it. He dropped off the radar after that. Your guess is as good as mine what he's up to nowadays. I would say "if he were still alive," but dying was never Nightprince's style.
- Blackwing

too easily identified, too slow to eliminate those who might expose them. I read Quietus' manifesto here, and while it was packed full of useful tips and insight, I found his fate inevitabl. I can probably count the number of successful assassins with this MO on one hand. That being said, they number among the best. They have to be. Black hearts beware.

For most triggermen, there is some form of limit. "No women, no kids," for example. "No elves." "No clergy." Some even refuse anything but a clean kill, painless and quick. Even the kicks who claim to be remorseless monsters generally have a point of refusal. And that's fine. At the very least it establishes brand identity. Which comes up later.

The opposite is, of course, true as well. Some hitmen pride themselves on having no limits at all, and there is a market for that. Sometimes you need the kind of killer who can murder children, blow up hospitals, and make a mess. The dirty work. You would think this kind of job pays bargain-bin prices, but as it turns out, the stuff at the bottom of the barrel can bring in the most. The rarity of hitters willing to take the work drives up the cost, not to mention having to make the manhunt afterward worth while. Selling your soul has its perks. But don't let those perks make you forget the currency you're shelling out.

THE SKILLSET

The classic assassin is a master of stealth and gunplay, and for the stereotypical sniper-for-hire, that's true. But the variety of ways an assassin can approach the job means that a diverse arsenal of aptitudes will get the job done regardless of the obstacles. More than that, though, a strong ability to observe, research, and devise tactics are essential.

In terms of murder, situational circumstances may make exceptional training unnecessary. If the mark has a special allergy, all you have to do is be in the right place to expose them to it. If you've got access to their bedroom (disguised as a maid, maybe), you can smother

them in their sleep or stab them. It doesn't take special skills to get a kill. But if a target was that easy to take down, no one would pay to have them killed. It's a hard target that warrants a professional, and professionals get the real money.

- Sending goons to whack somebody is usually a mistake, a message, or a tailchaser. Never assume you're safe just because you took down a van full of wannabes.
- Fianchetto

The professional faces trained, motivated security teams, coordinated and equipped, rapid and focused. They have built a network of eyes to find you and ways to stop you. You need to find the narrow flaws in their network and either slip through to get the job done, or collapse the whole thing and take the target down in the confusion. That means attention to detail. An expert level of knowledge about security systems is a must, both their operation and subversion. Remaining unnoticed isn't just about being ninja-quiet, it's about blending in and making your gear blend in until it's time to ditch it. The ability to outrun and outlast your mark and their escorts can mean the difference between an escape and a kill. Training and regular practice of games theory builds tactical sense and reflexive adaptation of plans. And most importantly, unlike most other types of operations, an assassin often has only one narrow window of opportunity to achieve their objective, often with a very small margin of error.

In short, the assassin has to be better, in almost every way.

- Whole lot of parallels between wetwork and extraction, I'm noticing ...
- /dev/grrl

- The jobs are similar. It can be argued that extraction is often the harder job. You can't very well snipe or explode an asset out from under their handlers.
- Cosmo

- True. But the nature of security is different. Targets for extraction are usually more in the open, and their escorts will shoot to stun or have non-lethal weapons more often, since there is a chance they'll have to shoot around the asset when the runners make the snatch. Bodyguards for a mark are more likely to shoot to kill, and they are on a higher level of alert because they know they don't get a second chance.
- Balladeer

THE OPPORTUNITY

Every journey begins with a single step. Every job needs a first day. Someone has to be willing to pay for another's death, and you have to be the one that gets paid. There are a few ways this can happen.

Networking is the simplest way to break in. Fixers are always scouting new talent, and if you've proven you've got talent, you'll be invited to a job. If you are promising, they'll likely give you something simple to cut your teeth on, see how you handle it, and move on from there with juicier work. That's called "grooming." After all, it pays to have an experienced killer who owes you a favor or two on speed dial.

For the street punk making good, this starts with small jobs. You're the one sent in to take down folks of minor importance, most often in the criminal underworld. Dealers and manufacturers, lieutenants and capos, distributors. The kinds of people that will be missed, either to send a message or knock their competitors off-balance for a larger plan. These jobs don't ask too much, and odds are you can get them done with no more than a shotgun at the right place and time. But it's an excellent opportunity to start learning the steps and honing your chops for the juicy jobs that await you. A clean kill, silent and precise, will get you respect. You cross the line between goon and professional, and that's where your quiet reputation begins.

- I fail to see any difference with shadowrunning.
- Slamm-0!

If, on the other hand, you are sent to do a job that, upon further investigation, is clearly out of your league, it's probable that you've been set up. You must have pissed someone off, and it's worth it to just bail. This is how most ex-spooks get their start. You can try to turn your skills on the monolith of industry that put you on the spot, but you're still just one soul. Better to run, better to hide. And if you can't help but give in to mission creep, then nurse your grudge with patience. It'll be good practice for the job. More on that shortly.

- I've learned to treat jobs with overly specific execution, timing, and location requirements as potential traps. If they hand you a file with a very precise plan and all the gear needed to pull it off, you should be asking yourself why they are bothering to pay you so much money to get the job done, especially if it puts you out in the open.
- Balladeer

AETHERPEDIA: ASSASSIN HANDLES IN POPULAR MEDIA

Iceman
Highbinder
Larakin
Butcher
Slayer

- What about the jobs that are meant to set someone up in a certain way? A frame up or the like?
- Tumbledown

- Even then, there's a question of the pay-to-skill ratio. If the plan requires a great degree of skill to achieve properly, then it is probably worth it. If it's all boxed up, nice and simple, and they're still offering to pay your price when they could be handing such a cakewalk to a rookie or a thug, you should be walking away. You'll miss a few paychecks that were honestly micromanaged, but you'll also avoid set-ups. A set-up is when they control the field of engagement. And if you're a professional, you know the value of holding that control yourself.
- Balladeer

The third way is much more Wild West. Someone puts out a hit through channels, public and shadow, much like a bounty, target wanted dead or alive. Dead is easier, trust me. So much less to deal with. All you have to do is bring proof of the deed. The stereotypical head in a bag is actually pretty effective, though Nightprince always preferred a heart in a medical cooler with a courier's license. Thanks to modern medical investigation and magical scanning, that kind of keepsake is both easy to prove and hard to duplicate, which is the point. Sure, it's dramatic, but death is dramatic, and no matter how cold all parties may be, there is nothing so heavy in the mind as death. Probably explains why the look of so many hitmen either goes against expectation and norms out, or falls into cliché whole-heartedly, becoming the very icon of movie assassins. But I digress.

- So what look did you favor?
- Kat o' NineTales

- Whatever the job called for, no more and no less. If you're at an exclusive party, either be a guest dressed to the nines or on the waitstaff. If you're slumming, jeans and synthleather. If it's your own time, it doesn't matter as long as it doesn't stand out. Me, I was most comfortable in the slum wear. Ah, the folly and freedom of youth.
- Blackwing

The mark, in this last case, is open season, and odds are they know it, meaning you have lost the element of surprise. What's worse, you'll have to deal with other cowboys and bounty hunters out for them, as well as corporate or governmental interests who might be interested in offering protective custody if they have anything juicy to offer (and most folks with a public bounty on their heads do, or else why go to the trouble?). And then, of course, there is the problem of hijackers. That bit of evidence of death you bring becomes the new target for the less moral among your competition (i.e., all of them). They bring that home instead of you, they collect the payday.

That last one is not my recommended path into the business, but then, it's also high-pay, high-risk, and for better or worse it builds a reputation quickly.

- These kinds of hits can devolve into bullet-storm free-for-alls. Most professionals steer clear.
- Sticks

- It's amateur hour all around. The kind of person who puts out a hit like this is either trying to make a statement or doesn't know how to hire professionals in a discreet manner. The one upside is that these jobs are usually over before they begin, since the corp cops have a vested interest in maintaining the public peace, so they'll just bring the mark into protective custody ASAP to avoid collateral damage.
- Cosmo

- This kind of op generally cleans out a lot of untalented wannabes. Natural selection at work.
- Balladeer

- There's plenty of opportunity surrounding these hits, though. You can get a great price out of the targeted party when you offer your services as bodyguards.
- Hard Exit

- Or just sell the data to the hunter if you'd rather not take them down yourself.
- Sticks

- It's not unheard of for larger criminal powers to join in the hunt, or for corp execs to make use of the chaos to take a poke at their rivals. There was a shootout between two competing bounty killers over a mark at a Stuffer Shack distribution depot last year that caused a suspicious degree of collateral damage without hitting each other and letting the mark get away early and scott free. Rumor is someone used the pretense to dress up company men as hunters and have them wreak havoc on Aztechnology while the getting was good.
- Red Anya

THE LIFESTYLE

It's funny how many assassins get into the business not because of talent or even nuyen, but the perceived standard of living the professional killer enjoys. Highballs in five-star skyraker hotel lounges, Armante and Westwinds, taking your contract calls from a yacht in Carib League waters. Surely with all that money you can afford the very best.

Well, you can. And that's just about it.

You see, money can buy luxury. And don't get me wrong, it's as good as it sounds. But sooner or later you begin to realize the inherent risks of being an assassin don't go away after the job is done. Whether you have a conscience or not, your kills hang over your head, and that means keeping that head low. It can be exceptionally hard to keep anyone close, friends or family. If you live the life of the wandering gunman, it's likely you don't stay in any place for very long, making building meaningful relationships a thing of the past. You wear expensive clothes to impress strangers, your company is high-priced call girls and boys, and your foie gras is eaten alone.

- Boo hoo. Poor baby, all alone in his tower.
- Clockwork

- Wait a second, I thought Blackwing had a wife and kids.
- Slamm-0!

- He does. As far as I can find, he hasn't done any work since he entered politics or built that family. And, of course, he is at the bleeding edge of his profession, making him exceptional and, therefore, the exception.
- Icarus

- Shadowrunners have a tendency to run into similar problems, but not to the extent assassins do, which kind of feeds into the "Among us, but not of us" attitude. Runners have the benefit of fitting into their networks more easily, diversity of work, and the outside chance we don't murder people during the course of our work. Plus, we work as a team, meaning we can all draw on each other's networks and strengths. The lone gunman doesn't have any wagons to circle. He may keep all the winnings, but he's always sleeping with one eye open and no one to trust.
- Thorn

- Blackwing is that rare example of the shadow op who goes straight, and the rarest who enters into a position of public power. His secret is an open one, and it plays to his intimidation value. Plus, with the specific resources he commands, anyone who tries to blackmail him doesn't have a very long life expectancy.
- Kia

The best assassins are operationally efficient, but must also be psychologically self-sufficient. Paranoia is a tool, yes, but without the right mindset, it runs amok and gets you killed, anyway. There is a reason corps and governments tend to tap agents from a pool of applicants who often fit psycho/sociopathic templates.

The fact is, assassins will spend a lot of time alone, both on and off the job. You either need to be solidly sane or, almost all of the time, the right kind of insane.

THE LONE GUNMAN

There's a lot to be said for going the loner route. No split commission, low overhead and residual presence, a lot easier to drop off the radar. And unfortunately, trust can be in short supply when it comes to professional murder. A lone gunman has no one to double cross and no one to be double crossed by. The loner must cross-train as best they can while still maintaining the killing edge over their competition and their opponents, but must often sub-contract others to assist with the job to cover bases they are unable to.

Psychosis, the kind where you hear voices and don't think you're alone? That won't work. But enjoying being alone, not needing permanent attachments? That's very good. For the rest of you, there's virtual companions, drinking buddies, autosoft psychiatrists and one night stands, and the money to pay for them all.

- The funny thing is, most Tír Ghosts fall into that super-sane profile, or at least seem to.
- Mika

- It's subjective observation, but I tend to disagree. Ghosts are exceptionally focused, and many of them are products of extremely deep and grueling training and indoctrination. Further, they develop the kind of constant situational awareness that is equivalent to wired reflexes, only without a on/off switch. This happens with special forces all over the world, where it's unlikely they could return to civilian life, assuming they would ever want to.
- Thorn

- Dedication is sanity until it becomes obsession.
- Arete

The isolation extends to professional networks. There are plenty of people out there who will do business with a killer for hire. After all, we have lots of cash from the work we do. But there will always be a barrier when they know you are a mercenary murderer. Sure, a shadowrunner might shoot guards and the like, but that's not a dedicated job requirement. Once someone knows your professional purpose, there's a wall that goes up behind their eyes. Death is fear, and fear is constant. And while you might think inspiring fear is a good thing, fear isn't trust, and you need to be able to trust your connections.

THE KNOT

Assassination is strategy. Strategy is preparation. The sims love the gun-fu aesthetic of a heated firefight.

THE KILL TEAM

The freelance assassin squad is rare but in high demand. Assuming the team is loyal to one another, whether as part of a larger operation like Chimera or out of personal affection like the Smoker's Club, a great deal can be achieved by the interdisciplinary range offered by a team. The team has greater resource costs and a greater operational footprint, but they rely less on external assistance, meaning fewer loose ends.

- I don't know if I'd say the Smokers were affectionate toward each other.
- Hard Exit

To them, taking out a mark is a high-octane thrill ride. They're right. It is. But the best-executed jobs are much more like a game of chess, and like chess, a hit is researched, planned, and prepared exhaustively before the first move is made.

It would be impossible to discuss the intricacies of every game, because every kill is at least a little different. The territory, the target's skills and defenses, and the exit. And, of course, how your skills and style interact with all of the above. Every element depends on the others, each overlapping. With that in mind, I'll ask you to bear with me, because planning a murder is a little like playing jazz—you can't do it in a linear fashion. The final product, however, is far more polished.

- Ugh, if I had a nuyen for every time some joker associated crime with jazz ...
- Kat o' NineTales

So, you've gotten your first job. There's usually (not always) a timetable, and often enough there is a special condition. "Make it look like an accident" is pretty common. "Make it look like their own guards/wife/son/famous politician did it" can happen, too. Sometimes you need to kill them in a specific place, at a specific moment, or with a specific weapon. These kinks might just add complications, or they can determine the nature of the entire job.

- There is a Yakuza boss I know of who likes to sign his death marks with a specially cast bullet. Any assassin he employs has to deliver the kill shot with that bullet.
- Mihoshi Oni

- What if your preferred weapon isn't the right caliber?
- Rigger X

- You know, I've never heard of that being a problem. He must have them made in all kinds of shapes and sizes.
- Mihoshi Oni

- What if you aren't a shooter?
- Ma'Fan

- Then either you aren't asked, or you learn.
- Pistons

- Or I imagine you kill them, then shoot the corpse?
- Baka Dabora

- This is getting morbid.
- Netcat

- What, the discussion about assassination? No shit.
- Clockwork

If there are no special conditions, planning is determined entirely by opportunity and adapting to defenses, both of which demand observation and research. How much you can do depends on the timeframe. See how complicated this gets?

If you have an open schedule, you can and should take the time to observe the target in-depth. This is where being a lone gunman is tougher than having a crew: a diverse set of skills and extra sets of eyes helps with alternative perspective, both physical and mental, as well as giving you people with expertise in digging up new intel. If you do go the loner route, you can sub-contract specialists for everything from astral analysis and scouting to data mining and subversive timed code.

- Just make sure you're not a loose end that needs tying up when your killer Mr. Johnson finishes their contract.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Don't get ahead of the story.
- Blackwing

SAFEHOUSE

Now, while you're doing all of this analysis, you need to remain close to the target, but incognito. Many of the best assassins are international, and of them most won't do a job in the town where they live most of the time. This generally means they need a safehouse. And because you're a forward-thinking kick artist, you're going to make it hard to get into but easy to escape. One that has narrow approach vectors you honeycomb with hidden cameras and motion sensors. One you've equipped with explosives, and maybe has an escape hatch to another level, or the sewers. You know, the kind of place you could escape in a hurry, undetected,

with lots of advance warning and something to slow them down.

- Some runners (smart ones) wire up their haunts with all kinds of sensors. Others set up a self-destruct system to cover their exit.
- Rigger X

- Or their system gets hacked and they get blown up in their beds.
- Pistons

- Only if they are a moron who doesn't know how to set decent security. I've lived by drones more times than I can count. Still have yet to die by one.
- Rigger X

- It's the rare soul who remembers dying more than once.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- He teed that one right up for you, didn't he?
- /dev/grrl

- There's more than one way to skin a cat. Gas bombs, safe rooms, you name it. A temporary flop for a job is easier to string up with grenades and small sensor nets. Save the elaborate stuff for when you need something long-term, or expect very heavy hitters to come knocking.
- Thorn

It's worth noting that hotels come with their own benefits and drawbacks. A five-star spot will have built-in security, a more secure Matrix presence, and of course will be more comfortable. That all can work against you, though, since you'll need a good SIN just to get a room, and if the authorities have some cause to pursue you, they can use all that security against you. The same goes for the Matrix, where all that prefabbed and redundant architecture turns into a tomb instead of a fortress. To say nothing of the difficulty of moving your hardware to your room without it being detected.

The other end of the spectrum is the fleabag, where the Matrix is fast and loose, there aren't any maids until you check out, and check-in is as simple as slotting the cred and giving an alias for the register. In this case, anonymity is your best bet, with any personal security being your responsibility. The upshot is, getting your gear in and out is a snap.

- I always take the latter. There's no reason to trust your operation to rent-a-cops when you can honeycomb your hideout with sensor nets.
- Rigger X

- An added bonus is that it's easier to arrange for an escape port in a low-end hotel. It's far more likely you won't be trapped in a tower. Closer to ground-level, you might have access to the sewers and more. Always keep an eye open.
- 2XL

The last resort, and in my opinion the best, is to get an apartment instead of a hotel room. It's pretty simple to get a small space with a passable burner SIN, and from there it's basically yours to do with what you will. If you give yourself enough time beforehand, if you're lucky, or if you throw enough money at the problem, you can get a place with no neighbors, soundproofing, escape routes, hidden Matrix nodes, and more.

Gone are the days of walls covered in maps and schematics, photos, and timetables. AR has disposed of that familiar and calming decor. That's a good thing when you need to pack it all up in a hurry, but it's important to remember that the use of visual arrangements matter. Make the space to rearrange data, observe patterns, look at things from new angles. A change of perspective can unlock a eureka moment and can make all the difference in finding the weak spot in plans, both yours and theirs.

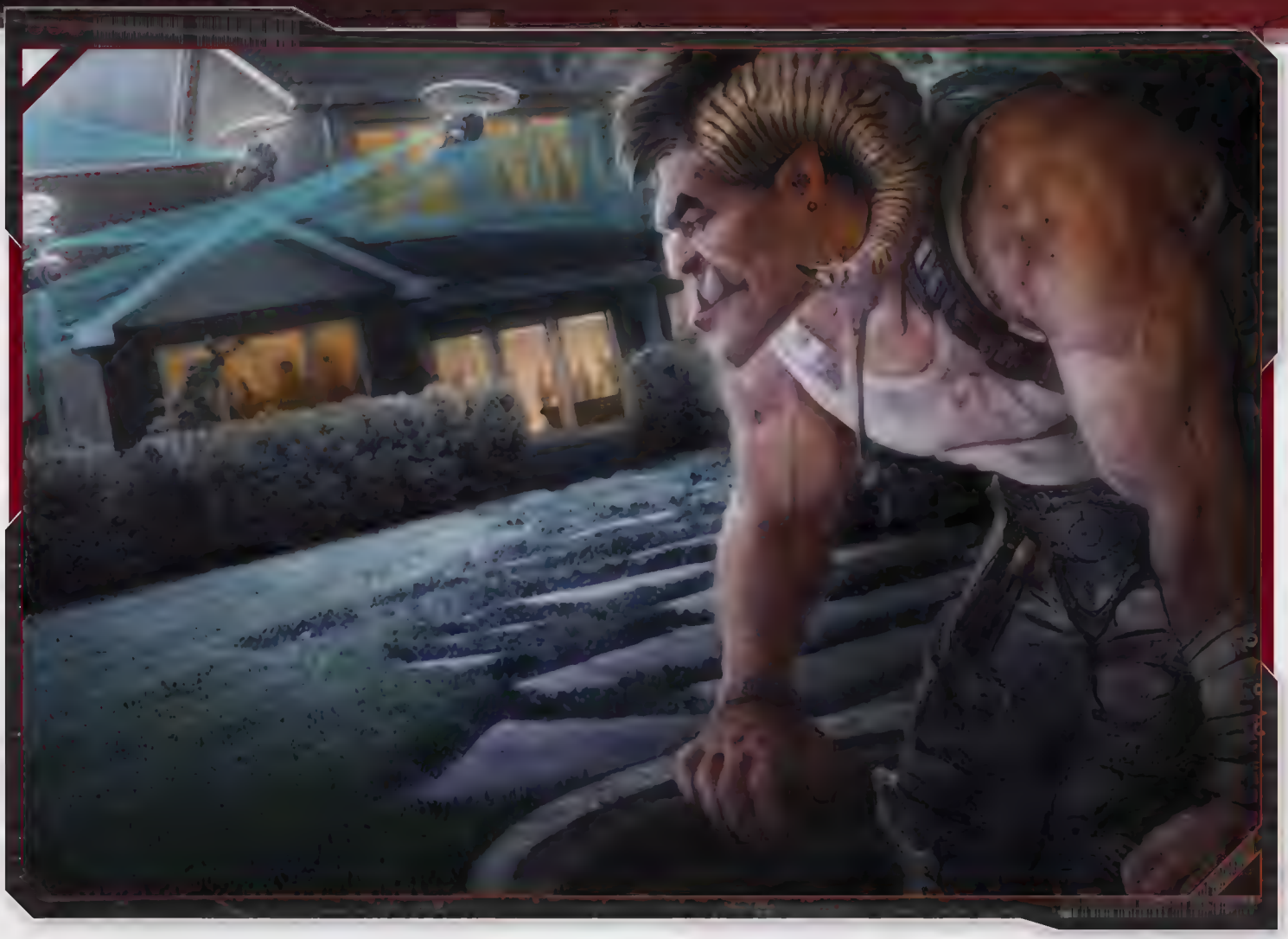
Beyond security and planning, you need to make sure the safehouse has the necessary facilities for the game you're playing. If you don't have everything prepared or purchased and ready to go, you'll need whatever it takes to finish the job yourself. Chemistry facilities for poisons or explosives, armory kits, disguises and tailoring elements, ritual circles, or whatever might be of use.

Special attention should be paid to a garage for a vehicle run. Using the one connected to a hotel is out of the question whether you need to make modifications or not, because it'll either be under surveillance or out in the open. You might consider getting a safehouse with attached vehicle storage. You could get a location farther away, which might add more steps between them finding you or not. If you need to ditch the car and lay low in town for a while, then a separate garage is ideal. Better, too, if you can destroy the vehicle after the hit. But if you'll be departing directly after the job, it's less important: you'll be burning the whole damn shebang, so it may as well go together.

- Fixers can usually be trusted to set up a decent safehouse on the go in a hurry, though it ends up costing more, especially for a rush job. Some specialists can even get a doss set up with everything you need, which is, in my opinion, well worth the extra expense.
- Lyran

THE TERRITORY

You now have a place to rest, arm, and prepare. Next you have to find the mark and the ground they cover.



Odds are the basics are in your briefing when you get the job, but the real research you'll have to do on your own. And the first thing to do is to scout the territory.

Before all else, think about the nature of the territory. Depending on your skillset and circumstances, it can make the job a little easier, a bit harder, or even impossible. Consider a contract on a biochemist on Ares' Daedalus Station. Just getting there is going to be a nightmare of bribes, fake SINs, and a great deal of reliance on a lot of moving parts to do their job, likely Mr. Johnson. You'll be very, very vulnerable, and every milligram of weight is calculated on your trip up. You'll be subject to a full biological screen. You will not be able to smuggle gear up there. You will not be able to slip poisons past them. You'll arrive, and your only options will be to kill the mark with an improvised weapon or hand to hand. And the moment they find out the mark is dead, the place goes on lockdown, with no possible escape egress.

In other words, don't take physical jobs in space.

- Why does that only make me feel somewhat safer?
- Orbital DK

- It comes up later.
- Glitch

Other places that can present similar problems are aquacologies and even particularly secure arcologies. Closed-in and highly regulated, you need a lot of pull, planning, and guile to achieve the kill and make a clean getaway. Wilderness is good for its isolation, though it can leave you exposed with no crowd to blend into, other faces for the enemy to analyze and consider while you fade away.

By far the best location is urban. The blend of crowds, blinds, megacorporate borders and available technology offers options, and options let you orchestrate events in a way best for you. Always make the situation fit you.

Most of the research is pattern recognition. Observation of the mark determines their habits, their security, and the layout of the places they frequent. Patterns

are weakness. The more you can predict their movements, the better you can find the vulnerable point in their security. A sniper can find the optimal roost. A poisoner can discover a mark's favorite coffee shop or restaurant or a way into their home kitchen. Exercise routines can reveal jogging routes, gyms, or personal trainers to subvert. Are they online? Where and how? Do they have bodyguards, and are they ever isolated from them? What are their sleep patterns? Do they sleep alone? Is there anyone you can substitute with disguises to get close? Does their job or hobby put them in a compromising position? Visits to a bordello, masseuse, doctor, tailor, anywhere they are isolated. Learn the terrain, and make it work for you.

- There are a lot of ways to gather this intel. Hacking local public surveillance and records can work well for the basic foundation. Drones, spirits, and live tails give you the details on-demand. You can get word on the street in person, though finding the local info-broker can save a lot of time, if you're willing to pay for the data.
- Netcat

You're going to have to take particular note of every person the mark has regular contact with. This includes the people who are around him that he never notices. If it's a corper or politician, security might include redundant teams that cover each other, including those the mark doesn't know about. This can happen for a few reasons: the mark might let details slip or could be mind probed, they are deep cover, or a secondary party has an interest in the mark's safety. This last one is of particular note, because it means that the mark may be an extraction target. More interestingly, it means the primary security detail may not be in contact with them, and may therefore not be coordinated with them. Watch them carefully to see if there are unified actions, or if the second team takes pains to remain unnoticed. Hack radio feeds and watch astrally to find any contact, and use facial recognition scans to dig up records on any of them you can in order to uncover any possible connections.

- It's a good idea to look up details on the individual members of the detail, anyway. The chink in their armor may be as easy to exploit as a bribe or blackmail, and you can find out what their training and skills are to best prepare for them.
- Fianchetto

- It's usually possible to find their identities because they have real lives, complete with real SINs. Plenty of data to be dug up, as long as you don't get too sentimental looking through someone's life knowing you plan to end it.
- Netcat

THE QUICK JOB

Despite the wisdom of a well-planned kill, some assassins may find it more expedient to locate the target and move in directly for the kill. This carries its own problems and merits.

Pros: The target has less time to get word of the assassin, and there is less opportunity for the killer to be spotted laying the groundwork.

Professional security generally expects the target to be attacked by other professionals. While they are prepared for improvised assaults and keep their eyes open at all times for the preparations for a hit, they might be taken by surprise if the assassin is sufficiently skilled.

The breakdown phase is executed much more quickly. With less to set up, there's less to take down, meaning all that's needed is an escape plan.

Cons: For all the avoidance of possible discovery, the complete lack of support and preparation means the entire hit is done with bare preliminary intel and improvisation. The job becomes much more about luck than skill, and that kind of amateurish approach is much easier to repel.

- Oh, spare me. What kind of hitman gives a damn who gets in the way of the job getting done?
- Clockwork

- A professional, for one. Asshole.
- Balladeer

- It's the security that doesn't have a record that you should worry about. If they're as SINless as you are, they might be other runners, or more likely black-ops spooks, complete with all the superior training and equipment that entails.
- Thorn

If the mark is a criminal or military professional, they will probably have a second or even third team, and you should bet that they are all coordinated (check anyway, you never know). These teams will work with their asset, instead of corralling them like a liability.

Note how the mark interacts with their security. If the security is hidden or undercover, do they seem aware of it? Scientists and other delicate types are usually kept calm with the illusion of a safe life, with undercover overwatch maintaining that happy fantasy for them. It makes the initial intel more difficult to plot out, but the kill itself can be a lot easier. It's likely there is one agent assigned to their detail that is, as far as they know, a colleague, friend or even lover. If you're going in for a close kill, that's the one you'll have to get through. They can be tough to spot, but the same rules apply as usual: They

are accommodating, unassuming, always close, at least in public, and confident (you know, the kind of confidence you get when you are capable of killing everyone in the room. The same kind you have).

THE MARK

Taking down a target isn't just about learning the patterns. The mark is central to the plot, the whole damn point. You can plan every little detail of the hit and still fail if you don't take the skills and abilities of the mark into account. Are they wired? A mage? Can they fight, and if so, how? Will they knock out your electronics, set you on fire or summon magical reinforcements with no more than a glance? Do they have any enhanced ability to anticipate danger, and if so, how can it be subverted?

Finding out these juicy tidbits can be accomplished by any number of methods, but you're going to be doing some legwork if you want it done right. A stolen corporate dossier is great, but word of mouth from reliable sources can offer insights you won't get anywhere else. As I have no gift for magic, I would always consult a mage for a thorough analysis of all the Awakened variables, from their own abilities to their mood. For the rest of us, a network of solid contacts is a must, and their discretion must be impeccable.

The nature, skills, and talents of your mark are important, depending on the game you're running. A dwarf usually has an enhanced resistance to poison. A banshee is immune, but wood or silver can kill them pretty quickly. Your target may be a close-combat specialist, but that won't stop a high-velocity round from five hundred meters away. A chemist might detect poison by smell before drinking it, but they probably aren't a match for you with a knife. Always maintain the element of surprise. A virtuakinetic won't know what to do against magic, and a mage will be confused when their toaster comes to life and tries to kill them but doesn't register as sorcery.

- Uh, that's not how that works ...
- Netcat

- No, dear, no, let's let him go on. Nothing to see here.
- Slamm-0!

Their equipment is important, too. First and foremost, their armor and their sensors. An unarmored target is ripe for a bullet or knife. If they have armor, where is it, and what is it still vulnerable to? Full combat armor is unlikely, but if they're wearing it for some reason, you'd better have explosives, spells, or brain-burning programs to deliver. Nine times out of ten, the head is exposed, which is one more reason the sniper assassin is such an accurate, if public, cliché. As to sensors, what kind of eyes, ears, and noses do they have? Metatype can help narrow it down, and a heads up on their cyber helps, too (more on that in a second), but there can be button-sized sensors planted damn near anywhere to give them insights that can undo your plans. Facial recognition software, cyber scanners, MADs, even emotional gauge softs can give away murderous intent, unless you're an actual psychopath. Which, in this job, is totally possible.

- Even likely!
- Slamm-0!

Consider, also, what your mark has that links them to reinforcements and rescue. A PanicButton or DocWagon bracelet can blow the whole job unless you are very thorough very quickly. They can make poisoning ineffective if they aren't fast and deadly. If there is even a ghost of a chance of these elements causing trouble for you, try to find a way to loop the signal transmission so that it keeps transmitting normal bio readings no matter what the mark is actually going through.

The chrome in your mark can be a benefit or a burden. If they are combat-capable, a close-in kill may be tough if they have spurs and wired reflexes. A chemical sensor in their nose or tongue can intercept poison attempts. If they are a decker and have some headware, you might have to contend with IC for a digital kill. But it's not all bad news: Medical implants for injuries or defects like heart regulators can be hacked for a nice, quiet kill, or at least used to incapacitate them. You can use tracking to coordinate the takedown or time a sniper shot. A young lady I worked with once used a mark's own drone escort against them. The drones had air-tight IC, but the mark's RFID didn't. She managed to reset it to a hostile tag, and the drones did the rest.

- Remember that souvenir Blackwing mentioned earlier? Odds are a target will have an RFID. Make sure it's not in the meat you take to your paymaster. Heads and hearts are both popular places for medical sensors.
- Butch

- And a hand or eye is a bad proof-of-death. Too easy to replace with cyber. Always make sure it's something they need to survive.
- Balladeer

Magic makes the whole game harder. An Awakened target should be researched thoroughly beforehand, because the sheer variety of magical abilities they could possibly command can define the entire job. If they are a combat mage, their line of sight could be enough to ignite you, turn you into a puddle of acid or goo, fry you with lightning, or a dozen dozen other effects. The indirect approach will come in handy here, with remotes, traps and explosives working well. A diviner is going to know you are coming. Just count on that. In that case,

GAMES

THE SNIPER

The assassin scouts the territory and finds a suitable roost with adequate view, camouflage, sustainability for long waits, and escape vector. Research indicates optimal times for a kill shot, taking into account local security, visibility, and target exposure. Arrangements are made for rapid departure after the shot is taken. It's the simplest and most well-known game in the book.

THE TURKEY SHOOT

A glorified drive-by, this job emphasizes an efficient and reliable set of escape routes are ensured for escape before security can respond. Switching vehicles and utilizing unorthodox paths and delaying tactics can make up the majority of this game.

THE BLOOD THIEF

A particular kind of job, the assassin needs to be a mage or have close access to one. A ritual sample is acquired of the mark, whether by breaking into a megacorporate or security facility, or taking it from their home, clinic or under other means. Once gained, the mage(s) initiate a ritual to kill the target at a time when they have minimal magical security and are not protected by wards.

THE BUMP 'N' JOSTLE

One of the originals. The assassin makes close contact with the mark, bumping into them. The bump can involve anything from a concealed blade, a prick from a poisoned needle, or even planting an explosive on the mark. Keep walking before anyone is the wiser, and make sure your face is well-concealed along all observed routes before and after the hit.

THE MATA HARI

Seduce and destroy. This can be anything from tempting the mark when they are on the town to substituting as their regular prostitute or even spouse. The object is to get close to them in an isolated setting to do the deed. As a bonus, this offers the opportunity for a quiet kill that may go unnoticed long enough to provide a getaway, making it quite popular.

THE ITALIAN MARRIAGE

A long-term kill, the mark is slowly given a poison that accumulates in their system over time. Aggregate poisons can be anything from heavy metals to genetically modified mycotoxins. With the prevalence of medical attention in corporate enclaves and the use of carcerands, this tactic has largely fallen out of favor. It is only used today when it helps to frame someone else for the killing, or as an outsourced proxy job to a chef or dissatisfied spouse.

THE SPECIAL DELIVERY

The assassin gains access to the mark under the guise of a courier. The nature of this disguise changes depending on the circumstances of the mark (a professional bonded courier is likely for a high-level corporate exec at work, while a bicycle-riding package runner can be sent to someone lower, more casual, or at home).

THE REPAIR TRUCK

A quiet game, the assassin arranges for the mark's vehicle stops working en route to another location (generally by sabotage), and makes sure their call for automotive assistance is redirected to them. The isolated mark can be taken somewhere for execution, body and vehicle free to be disposed of or arranged in another location as per the client's specifications.

THE MEDICAL EMERGENCY

The Repair Truck for the metahuman body. A minor medical emergency can be arranged by toxin or simulated gang attack, or a DocWagon bracelet hacked to insist an medical emergency, which is also redirected to the assassin, who then picks up the mark to bring them to whatever location they see fit. This one requires more work and gear, including appropriate medical costume, jargon, equipment, and gear, as well as an accompanying team, but it allows for deeper penetration into fortified locations instead of waiting for transit. Not as useful for arcologies and other locations that have incorporated medical facilities. Sometimes used as a backup plan if the first attempt at a kill fails.

THE TRIPLE-A

A classic car bomb. Explosives are attached to the mark's vehicle, and detonate while they drive. Vehicular scans can make this difficult, but it remains in use even in the 2070s.

THE HIJACKER

A Matrix/rigger hit, the assassin takes over the mark's transportation while inside and uses their domination of the vehicle to eliminate the target. This can include slamming the car into a wall or running it off a bridge, to more subtle maneuvers like driving it into an exceptionally dangerous part of town (perhaps

GAMES, CONT.

prepared to be dangerous), or redirecting ventilation to flood the car with emissions and locking the windows, suffocating them. Note that if this somehow involves detonating the car, it is called a Triple-A.

THE BELFAST BOMB

A variant of the Triple-A, and extremely unsubtle, the mark is attacked by a car not their own rigged to explode. It can be as simple as parking next to them in traffic and detonating. Best when used by remote for obvious reasons.

THE KANSAS CITY SHUFFLE

A classic misdirection maneuver for black-ops, criminals, assassins and shadowrunners, the mark is distracted by a false flag, directing all energy toward one perceived threat and leaving openings for the real job. This can be as simple as firecrackers going off in one direction while approaching from another, to subcontracting an entire run to keep guards busy. The point is that the mark and their security believe the objective to be entirely different, and their reactions are completely off for the intended assassination approach. Very useful with Bump' n' Jostle, Snipers, and Blood Thieves.

THE HELL IN A HANDBASKET

A difficult game to pull in the age of chemsniffers and ultrasonic scans, a package of explosives or toxins is sent to the target's location. Success may increase by a personal delivery under the guise of a courier, but most important is finding a weak point in the schedule or approach that allows insertion of the package. Also important is ensuring that the package is not opened by a mail clerk or secretary, particularly if it is a toxin or timed explosive.

THE CAT'S CRADLE

In this innovation of the twenty-first century, a doorway rarely used by anyone but the mark is strung with monofilament wires. The momentum of their walking speed, alone, is enough force to slice almost any metahuman apart. More disturbing, even if they try to stop short, the damage already done either causes them to fall through or fall back and bleed to death. This is sometimes achieved with a single strand (at the neck it's called a Headsman or Guillotine, at the waist a Magician's Saw), or a network of strands for maximum effectiveness (A Widow's Web or Death Net).

THE WYLIE

Lethal misdirection. Using illusion magic, psychotropic suggestion or even high-definition AR overlays, the mark is convinced they are walking, driving, etc. into a clear area which is, in fact, deadly. Examples include open elevator shaft, off of balconies, roofs or open windows, into traffic, etc. (The mark is often referred to as a Roadrunner in this case.)

THE BARFLY

A poisoner method, this involves getting close to a subject who enjoys going out and getting drunk. Drugs as simple as morphine administered while drunk can cause fatal reactions, with little in the system to indicate anything but death by alcohol.

THE PUPPETEER

Much like the Hijacker, but taking over the mark's body to lead them to their own death. While spells like Influence are not powerful enough to override the inherent survival instinct in a metahuman, Control Actions can force the victim to whatever action is desired, usually a suicide, though sometimes this is used to attack the target by means of someone close, to better confuse the trail. This can also be achieved by cyberhacking a target's limbs or otherwise overriding their motor functions directly.

traps are almost pointless. I've had the most luck by introducing elements of chaos into the kill. Not desirable for the control-freak nature of most assassins, but by bringing in randomizing factors, you can maximize the likelihood of their death. Similarly, you can bring in another kick artist to try to commit a simultaneous job. The more moving parts, the less accurate their predictions, meaning that while you will have to split the contract, you'll make the kill. The same goes for detection specialists, so the best way is to overwhelm them. Assume they can dodge bullets and detect intent. Taking an illusionist down is a matter of getting the drop on them, which is really business as usual. Those who know how to change shape can make a speedy and unexpected getaway or retaliation if you don't take them down quickly, so the same rules apply.

- Blackwing isn't wrong, but he does exaggerate, as most mundanes do, because they don't understand how debilitating drain can be.
- Ethernaut

- It may be debilitating, but you'd be surprised how focused you can be when the choice is between drain and death. Nothing helps with channeling mana like pure survival instinct.
- Winterhawk

Conjurors deserve a special mention, because they are attended by otherwise invisible spotters and blockers. Detection spirits can sense incoming danger, and protection spirits can intercept incoming magic or bullets. They can sense your aura and your hostile intent, can whisk the mark away to safety or cloak them from your perception, and all the while another spirit can hunt you down and tear you apart. The only surefire way to get rid of them is to kill the conjuror. If the conjuror isn't taken out, they'll just keep bringing in more reinforcements.

There's no surefire way to compensate for summon-capable marks, except to be sure you have a specialist of your own on hand. They can bring in their own spirits for a battle royale, leaving you free to take down the now-alerted target. Or they can work banishing duty, taking down bound spirits one at a time. For the non-mages like myself, a petit-brume grenade can block the spirits off while you make the kill. If the territory includes any zones with background count, make use of them to scramble enemy perception and capacity. And if you can get your hands on it, a cloud of Strain III Beta will obliterate every single spirit in the zone of engagement and nullify all mages on-site. Not easy to acquire, and it comes with its own headaches, but if you don't have or need magical assets of your own and need to level the playing field, I've never seen a better option.

MAGICAL ASSASSINATION

Magic offers a vast layer of complication for both the assassin and the mark. Detect Enemy can give warning of an approaching assassin, and Combat Sense can provide the edge to dodge them. What could be a lethal poisoning or gunshot wound can be instantly treated with Antidote or Stabilize. Barriers can cut off points of escape or pursuit. Summoned minions can make apt bodyguards or proxy assassins. And the number of ways magic can kill extends beyond reckoning. An Awakened assassin might utilize counterspelling to prevent magical protection and healing as well, allowing more conventional means of execution to succeed.

- Does he have any idea how incredibly bad for the manasphere that it? We're talking about chewing on Gaia's very soul for the sake of making money through murder. Where do you draw the line?
- Ecotope

- Oh, cry me a river. Megacorps do worse every day making the same crap you eat. What's another drop in the bucket?
- Clockwork

- And you're saying we should emulate the megacorps, of all things?
- Aufheben

- We're all here for a paycheck. It's a dog eat dog world, and I'll do what I have to for mine.
- Clockwork

- You haven't been in Chicago recently, have you? If you could see what I see there, you'd know the scars Strain III leaves behind don't heal fast or easy.
- Red

- Some scars never heal, and only serve to hide the putrescence boiling beneath.
- Man-of-Many-Names

It's important to remember that your target won't have to be a mage to have the benefit of magic to protect them. A mage on overwatch as part of their security detail works just as well, but remember that wealthy and important marks might have spells anchored on them, deflecting bullets, forewarning of danger, making them vanish from sight, healing them, neutralizing toxins, and so on. They might also have spirits assigned to obey them as though they were the summoner, or just generally guarding them without further orders. Am I

AETHERPEDIA: ASSASSINATION METHODS

Of 226 principal incidents evaluated in a major study about assassination attempts in the UCAS in the first half of the 21th century, fifty-one percent were undertaken by a handgun, thirty percent with a rifle or shotgun, fifteen percent used knives, and eight percent involved explosives (usage of multiple weapons/methods was reported in sixteen percent of all cases).

- No notes on poisoning?
- Glitch

stressing enough that a thorough period of observation is needed?

- YES. OH MY FUCK, YES YOU ARE.
- /dev/grrl

- Simmer down, little britches. You're too young to remember this guy, but I'm not. I'm taking notes. You should be, too.
- Kane

- Seriously?
- /dev/grrl

- Oh, yeah. You have any idea the kind of hell I could raise if I take down the legendary Blackwing?
- Kane

A mark with skills in the Matrix might offer a different opportunity. I'm not a decker, but I know of a few assassins who deal exclusively in digital hits, such as switcH/Kill out of Russia. If the target is online all the time, or if they are buried too deep in secure holdings to get to physically (such as a space station, an aquacology, or some other tight-as-a-duck's-ass location), then a Matrix kill may become necessary. I mentioned earlier that a linklock is essential for this kind of kill, and I meant it. Keeping them trapped online while you do your job is essential. Really, this works on the same principle as killing anyone on the Matrix: max out your stealth, use Black IC to annihilate them quick, and get the hell out before you are caught. A more clever killer who wants or needs to make things look like an accident might trap them in a system and then crash it with their brain as a casualty, or could use psychotropics to make them kill themselves later or really anything. Psychotropics are really scary things.

- Dr. Gunter Von Bach uses BTLs and psychotropics to make sleeper assassins. A killer by proxy.
- Glitch

- Making the target kill themselves is much more direct, and frankly more crude, since the compulsion is probably applied directly and quickly, like a Black Hammer attack. Lace it with the right code, and the one getting blasted doesn't get hurt, just has a splitting headache and dizziness for a few minutes while their engrams get rearranged. Then they go off and fulfill their programming. Delicate, subtle stuff takes time and conditioning, but something as simple as suicide could probably be planted quick and dirty.
- Pistons

- Not quite. Hardwired things like survival instinct are very tough to override. Building a suicide soldier is a time-consuming process, whether it's chemical, digital, magical, or psychological. Quick psychotropics can bend behaviors but not break them. For example, it might try to turn a hacker into a sleeper who reports on their friends. A runner who isn't particularly loyal might give in to the programming easily, while one with better chummers might take longer to succumb or shake it off entirely. Unless they have a clear-cut suicide wish, there's little chance of that taking hold.

  What *can* work is a psychotropic that makes them more vulnerable to accidental death. If the target is absent-minded by nature, it would be possible to make them not notice certain risks, or to add to their distraction. You could also make very specific circumventions. Say the target were a chemist who works with very caustic chemicals. The right psychotropics might make the victim think of them as benevolent. I imagine the most effective programming would cause the target to go into a berserker frenzy when they see security guards of any type. There would be a fair chance of their own escorts taking them down in self-defense.
- The Smiling Bandit

- What's this? Do I have one up on the Bandit? You overlooked directed subliminals. You can program a specific, triggered action, like focusing on your email list while walking forward twenty steps after hearing a specific musical cue. You wait until they're in a spot where twenty unthinking steps takes them into danger, say, an electrified monorail or right in front of the train or off a ledge, and you send a transmission with the encoded cue. Their inherent self-preservation doesn't kick in because they are focused on the mundane task at hand.
- Turbo Bunny

- Can you make them do anything?
- /dev/grrl

- As long as it's simple motor functions, things you take for granted but consciously do and won't notice until it's too late, yeah. So, no telling someone to stop breathing. Like I said with the e-mail thing, keep them distracted and make the motion subconscious.
- Turbo Bunny

- My hat's off to you, my dear.
- The Smiling Bandit

- Don't forget using this drek to turn someone close to them. Maybe the mark isn't going to kill themselves, but a sufficiently annoyed bodyguard or someone else close might be driven to berserk against them with the right triggers.
- Bull

- And you could get zapped by this stuff at any time that you're using a DNI?
- /dev/grrl

- I don't see why not. Who says you aren't being subtly influenced to buy certain products even now?
- The Smiling Bandit

- /dev/grrl has disconnected

The Matrix mark can still be hit in meatspace. I've had some luck with hits like that when I can get close to them. Their mind is somewhere in the digital ether, leaving their body just sitting there. Pose as an assistant bringing them coffee or ninja your way in, and you'll find yourself with a totally exposed target. For the ones you catch on the go, whether they are a decker or a VK is important. If they are a decker, do they have access to their deck? Is it implanted? If so, they can use that crap even if you catch them with their pants literally down. If not, separate them from the deck and life is a little easier. Their access to the Matrix determines if they might have a drone network in easy reach (don't expect that RFID trick from earlier to work often—little Riley Moses is a very gifted decker and hitwoman). They can access local security feeds and sensor systems and might be able to detect you ahead of time through it. I saw a hitter sniffed out by a decker when they passed too close to a metal detector outside an outlet in a mall. The detector just knew there was metal, but it didn't understand the shape of a knife. The paranoid decker did and was able to give the hit the slip, who meanwhile was gunned down when security was notified and he tried to fight his way clear. Which is one more thing the decker can and will do when attacked: they'll bring reinforcements with a signal sent at the speed of human thought, and more detailed than any other medium on Earth.

MATRIX ASSASSINATIONS

Anyone with a DNI connection to the Matrix is vulnerable to death by Black IC. The digital assassin might engage their mark online for a direct confrontation, unleash a swarm of killer Agents or Sprites, or lay viral traps. Link locks deserve special attention, since trapping the mark can make the job much easier. Matrix maneuvers might also coordinate with actions in meatspace, psychotropically influencing the target to kill themselves (walking into traffic or into gang territory, dropping an appliance into a bathtub to simulate a suicide, etc) or leading them into a trap.

- Sometimes, rarely, killing someone while they are jacked in results in an e-ghost. The body is dead, but the mind, or something like it, lingers on…
- Plan 9

- I wonder if that still counts as a kill.
- Balladeer

- I really miss when I could just dismiss that drek as whiskey legend …
- Bull

A talented decker will have other tricks at their disposal, not the least of which includes hacking into your gear and 'ware. I was almost taken down when my rifle was reverse-hacked for a blowback that would have taken off half my face. The less protected or sophisticated your cyberware, the more likely a decker makes it a liability. If you've got cybereyes, you're blind. Ears, deaf. You get it.

- What, he acts like none of us have ever had to deal with a cyberhack before.
- Slamm-0!

- Considering his opinion of shadowrunners, and that this is a post for would-be assassins in the making, yeah, he probably thinks it's a good idea to cover all the bases.
- Pistons

- It's the obvious that can be overlooked, especially in the heat of the moment.
- Bull

- More than that, it's associative memory training. The human mind creates connections between topics as it is exposed to data. Sense memory is proof of this, such as when a song reminds you of a memory ten years old and otherwise forgotten. When the drek is hitting the fan, you

react by instinct, and trained memory associations make sure data isn't cut off or lost when it's needed. A reminder of the basics, in association with the rest of this and sorted into useful articles, makes sure of it. He's doing you a favor by reminding you that these things are connected.

- Fianchetto

Neutralizing a Matrix-savvy mark away from the net means isolating them. If they're not wired, it's as simple as waiting until they are away from their gear or jamming them. If you can't get them AFD, then increase the jamming. Scramble their wireless connections to cut them off and take them down fast. You're going to fantasize about trapping them in a Faraday cage, but that's not going to happen. A few layers of jamming and signal scrambles and encoders will keep them confused enough to get the job done.

Technomancers follow most of the same rules with a few interesting alterations. Mainly, a VK is always on. They're hooked up, and that's not going to change. They will have the advantage on you just because they are living online, every second. And it won't necessitate an RFID chip or something you can hack. What's more, they can have weird programs of their own design that help them, a lot like agents but smarter and more powerful. From what I hear, they could leap into your gear or cyber, or the environment around you, turning it against you.

- Wow. He actually sounds like he's afraid of technomancers.
- Netcat

- Not everyone knows you as well as I do, darling.
- Slamm-0!

- Blackwing is old-school, and virtuakinetics are new to the game. Even after a few years, there are still plenty of folks who don't know understand the phenomenon. And it's likely they won't for a long time, considering how long people have had to get used to magic but still treat it with superstition and alarm.
- Ethernaut

- Maybe it has something to do with all the pentagrams and wands and chanting?
- Kay St. Irregular

- Quiet, you.
- Ethernaut

The good news is that what makes them strong also makes them vulnerable: You drop a jammer on them, and they can't just shut off or go cold-sim like a decker. You are pushing static right into their brain, and that makes for a confused, weakened target. You cut them off from the Matrix, and a VK is as good as dead.

- If only it were that simple ...
- Clockwork

THE CONTINGENCY

The point of all this planning is to kill the mark before they see you coming. You never get another chance like the first one, and the element of surprise makes all the difference. If it's lost, every following aspect of the job becomes that much harder, and it's the advantage that is the hallmark of the successful assassin. That being said, getting the job done is what is most important, and that means a back-up plan or two.

Some prefer to set their contingencies in swift order. A close-in stab fails to take them down? Then the explosives you planted in their escape route will finish the job. Mind-controlled bodyguard fails to make the kill for you? Have a second one. One of the best jobs I can remember seeing had a series of droned sniper rifles covering every corridor of retreat. The guns had enough angles of fire that there was just no getting away. Another hitter once tried a drive-by that failed to take the mark down but managed to eliminate most of their bodyguards. They knew the target would return home immediately instead of heading for the authorities or their mob allies, so they had strung the front door with monofiliment wire. First in the door is the first to lose their head. A sloppy hit can be a front for a sharp one.

- Ugh. Monofilament is the creepiest crap. I've seen people lose a finger and not realize it until they started bleeding out.
- Pistons

- It's not clean, but it's quick, and damn hard to detect. It'd probably see more use if it weren't so expensive.
- Fianchetto

THE DROP

So you've done your research, set up your safehouse, and you've got Plan A, B and C all set. All that's left is to kick out the stool and let them drop.

DIVINATION RACES

One of the most unorthodox arms races in the assassination game is the application of precognitive techniques. Both the hunter and the hunted can benefit from the spread of tarot cards and crystal gazing, to the more technological aspects of tacsofts, probability calculating agents, and psycho-analytical software, but only if the other side has not invested in this security, as well.

As a result, both assassins and marks are often locked in a cold war when divination is involved, though a safe rule of thumb is to assume that any magical or particularly wealthy target may have the benefit of forewarning of an assassin. This warning is almost always murky and non-specific, as all divination tends to be. Even technological means of prognostication can only give percentiles of probability, narrowing the margins of error, but never eliminating them.

Exhaustive planning means that this can be as simple as letting the pieces fall into place. With enough elements, some jobs are completed with the push of a button. A timed explosive can let you get away from the territory long before the job is carried out, assuming it is carried off without a hitch. Most aren't so elementary, but it's the assassin ideal.

The fact is, games theory exists for a reason. There are far too many ways to kill a person for me to exhaustively list them here. But I listed some of the more common outlays to help you get in the right frame of mind. Add variations on a theme, and you can cover hundreds of scenarios.

TIMING

More often than not, any planned assassination is on a very strict timetable. Security patterns and procedures, habits and routines, these operate on schedules, consciously or subconsciously, and exploiting them requires a very sharp sense of timing. This can be anything from the moment to pull the trigger to when to leave a door ajar to slipping past security shift changes. Every assassin, like every great general, needs an impeccable sense of timing. Without it, they are useless.

- I know one exception to this rule. A hitwoman out of Belarus does all her work by triggers and timers, automated. Without the plan, she would be useless. But she's long gone from the scene of the crime by the time it's gone down. Last I saw her, she was doing well for herself, but she seems like the exception over the rule.
- Red Anya

- He doesn't mention it, but social engineering can kill as sure as anything else. I know of a social adept who might as well be an assassin: his MO is to ruin someone's life to the point of their death. I've heard of him talking overworked scientists into throwing themselves off skyraker balconies or convincing mobsters to turn states, knowing they'll catch the bullet. One time he turned an entire Chicago Zonegang on their leader.
- Kia

WITHDRAWAL

The killing moment is planned to perfection, laid out with loving detail and attention to every variable. So what happens when that one little element you hadn't planned on inevitably twists your plan beyond repair? The seconds following the drop are crucial to the assassin's survival and freedom. Do you break for it or play it cool? Stealth, guile, or brute force can see you to safety, if you plan it out, pay attention, and play your cards right.

The ability to adapt quickly is the greatest asset any kick artist can cultivate. Even the most rote of lives can develop a deviation from routine at any moment. How quickly can you keep up with unexpected twists?

More often and most importantly, how well can you improvise in the face of chaos? The moments following the drop are almost always a scramble. If their security is any good, that means you've got, on average, between two and five minutes to get out of there.

In the end, the moment of execution is what it all comes down to. Assassination may seem like it's mostly the prep work, but ultimately, it's timing that determines everything.

There are only a few situations where you should immediately and loudly attempt an escape, namely in situations where you have already been spotted or the assassination, for whatever reason, needs to be public. I suppose a drive-by counts, but I consider that an amateur game unless it's a frame-up, and even then it can be carried off with some stealth in the getaway.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, though, you're going to play it cool whether you leave immediately or hang out for a while. In general, it's better to get going after the deed is done, but only if that won't draw attention. The entire point of hanging around once the kill is confirmed is to wait until the right moment to leave without attracting suspicion. Party guest, bystander, or just continuing on your tranquil Sunday walk after innocently bumping into the biochemist with a touch of DMSO Green Ring 8 carcerands. This is stealth, and it's the most obvious answer. The less exposure, the less danger. And in cases where the mark needs to have appeared to have died naturally, it's a necessity.

You also need to consider the terrain again. Your escape is going to be very different depending on the ground you need to cover, the inherent lay of the land. A snipe job on a military caravan in the middle of the desert isn't going to go down very well if you're trying to shoot and run, whether by foot or truck. You're better off having a fool-proof blind you can hide in, an incredibly reliable camouflage (think a thermoptic camo suit with a ruthenium polymer cloak and a few concealment spells and spirits—this is the military we're talking about), or a very fast means of aerial egress. In this case, I've had fun using a drone modified with a carry-bar. If you have the life support and can cloak it well enough, a Kull can be your best friend.

- The Kull doesn't get nearly enough credit. I've used them for everything from scouting to supply drops to bombing runs.
- Picador

- Yeah, but they don't have any style to 'em.
- Rigger X

A big corporate park or arcology is akin to operating inside the belly of the beast. Every bit of terrain is your enemy, so you have to get to know it intimately. In this case, the stealth approach is your best bet, with bribes, cover, distractions, even a patsy in place to cover your withdrawal. This covers neutral hotels and other public, contained locations, to a lesser extent.

Dense urban environments present their own complications for escape. On the streets of Manhattan, the police are hyper-responsive, the buildings clean and tall, and there are cameras everywhere. Kowloon has crowds literally everywhere, decay and prefabs rotting, stacked one on top of another, garbage everywhere and utilities neglected and usually broken. Prague has catacombs, ancient sewers, bird nests for snipers everywhere, a city of shadows and angles (always accept a job in Prague). These kinds of environments depend of quick thinking and adaptation, because they are the most prone to change. A clean city like Manhattan will require a good hacker to subvert and even convert all that security and utility to your service. An automated door, image-recognition system, locks, elevators, and more can be set up ahead of time to give you a clean getaway, and a city that runs like clockwork is going to be predictable and follow your timetable. The sewers and ducts are clean and likely monitored, meaning you have additional paths, if you can secure them during prep. The people make enough money that they don't respond to risky opportunity, bribes or change in general with anything but fear and taking cover. Some will probably just hit their PanicButtons and pray. Kowloon is the opposite: a rusting hulk of festering urban cancer. Using ducts and sewers is almost out of the question: neglected and unsecured, yes, but have you ever seen an overflowing sewer? It's so thick you can't even swim it, assuming even the finest biohazard treatment could

protect you. You can't rely on anything but its inherent chaos, and your ability to think quickly will determine everything. Moving fast, adapting to a shifting landscape, and mapping as much as you can by talking to locals as opposed to relying on expired mapsofts ensure you have as many advantages as possible. Some training in parkour is especially useful here, as you may find yourself making due with incomplete architecture and collapsed or jammed passages. Nothing quite like hopping down an elevator shaft while they're left scratching their heads.

The people, as well, are a resource in a poverty-stricken area. If there is a hard local currency, throwing a handful in the air turns a crowd into a barrier against pursuit. They'll take that chance, and they'll likely do any number of other small favors if you pay them. On the other hand, intimidation is less likely to work. These people sleep next to devil rats, and getting into a gang is seen as a step up. Hell, in Kowloon they say becoming an insect spirit is an improvement. They won't scare easy, so don't bother.

- Gonna agree to disagree with you there, Blackwing. Sometimes the only thing these folks understand, or respect, is when you show some teeth.
- 2XL

- Gauge your audience. Sometimes the soft touch means everything when they have nothing.
- Red

LIVING WITH IT

I'm not talking about the morality. You wouldn't have gotten this far if you didn't know how to move on and let go. I'm talking about the short-term actions to stay free of pursuit and discovery, the long-term consequences of paid murder, and getting away with it.

REVIEW

Post-operational analysis is something every soldier learns to do, from the after-action reports of a field

trooper to the shit-talking go-gangers get up to after a particularly hairy stunt. It offers a chance to learn from mistakes, but most importantly for the assassin, it looks over the potential sources of fallout after the job is complete. Detailed review of every aspect tells you where there might be footage of you, who might have witnessed things, what ritual samples were left, things that enable you anticipate potential trouble down the line. Maintaining an operation journal is important for this purpose.

- Until the end of the op, anyway, at which point you make sure the data is burned for good. On the off chance you get pinched, you don't want to leave all sorts of footage of you offing a bunch of unsolved murders.
- Fianchetto

- A dead-man switch is a good move. Can't be too careful with that level of incrimination. Either you're in control, or the data is ashes.
- Pistons

- I do the same with my teams even though I don't accept wetwork contracts. Erasing a trail and refining tactics means we're that much better every time.
- Red

- I saw some joker who saved stuff for a résumé on his P2.0 account. LA is a weird place.
- /dev/grrl

- I knew you couldn't stay off.
- Red

- Your hardcopy stuff is boring.
- /dev/grrl

- I can read it out loud to you …
- Red

REFERENCES AND ASSETS

Part of the post-op review is taking a long look at those who helped with the job. Different jobs demand different services, and having a little black book of contacts you can trust wherever you go can make the rest of your career that much easier and efficient. A local, effective, discreet arms dealer, info broker, smuggler or mage-for-hire can save time.

It's worth noting that it's safer to have these connections of your own to draw on. Mr. Johnson may offer to set you up with equipment on-site or a dealer who can supply your needs. While this cuts on costs, it's much wiser to insist on expenses comped or a stipend. The more control you maintain over your gear and circumstances, the less risk and worry. I've known my share of kick artists who met their end because the weapon was a trap. Sometimes the client doesn't want to pay up after the deed is done. Sometimes the assassin is just being set up to help make a point. I remember a classic sniper setup a young man called Basilus accepted. He scouted the terrain, had an escape route all set, and the perfect perch. He pulled the trigger, only to find the sights had been intentionally misaligned, causing him to miss the shot and alert the guards. He managed to get away, barely, and later found out Mr. Johnson was working for a competing security company. The mark got spooked enough to drop his current protection program due to the close call. Funny how most folks don't care what happens to an assassin.

- This might sound obvious, but assassins tend to be transnational, and the need for discretion is much greater. Friends, or at least reliably buyable allies, mean a whole lot more when it's harder to connect with the shadow community.
- Red Anya

- I hate to say it, but buying local is pretty important when you need dangerous contraband and you travel all the time. It can be cheaper to buy custom gear near the job instead of smuggling it across international lines.
- 2XL

Of course, there are also material assets that might come in handy should you ever return to previous stomping grounds. Caches of weapons and gear in safehouses across the world can prove to be an advantage, but also a liability. There's the possibility they'll be discovered, and that can lead back to you. With sufficient sterilization, it's possible you can sidestep this, though I never take the risk of keeping heavy hardware. My personal suggestion? Maintain a go-bag in every major city you visit. If the job goes wrong while you're there, you'll have a fake SIN, credsticks, and a weapon. You'd be amazed how far those alone can take you when all else fails and the world turns against you.

LOOSE ENDS

The flipside of a preservable asset is a loose end. This means anyone who can connect you to the crime who isn't your employer or a specifically trusted contact. Not all assassins go to the length of wiping out everyone who saw the job go down, but it's the safest way to avoid detection. This can work out to your benefit in some cases. A maid who walked in at the wrong moment isn't just a liability, but an opportunity. Take her out, and you can make the job look like a murder suicide or a mutual gundown, depending on your circumstances. Handled poorly, it results in very gruesome mission creep, with bodies piling up as one job gives way to several more, and perhaps more spawning from

there. This only happens as the result of some very sloppy work mixed with some very paranoid thinking, but it has been known to happen. Personally, I don't go in for this kind of thinking. Precision planning can make for one-shot, one-kill jobs almost every time, and turning death angel to cover your tracks just makes more tracks to be followed. Get in, get out, and walk away.

- I've seen similar thinking in quiet Matrix jobs. A decker gets into a system and gets obsessive about his trail to the point of making more noise cleaning it up than he did making it in the first place.
- Netcat

The more important kind of loose end is the unreliable asset. If anyone is connected to the job who can identify you and has proven to be untrustworthy, selling you out or leaking info, it can be expedient to just liquidate them. You'll likely step on a few toes, especially if they are connected to your employer or an organized criminal concern, but it should be understood that crossing an assassin is a bad move. Sometimes it's as simple as contacting Mr. Johnson to let them know they have a leaky ship, but if you want total control and assurance, you need to know that someone who has seen your face and knows details about you is silenced, permanently. That means taking matters into your own hands and making sure the job is done right.

- This kind of thing bleeds over into other kinds of runs. If you've got enough negotiation savvy, it may be possible to convince the Johnson to throw in a bonus for the inconvenience, or turn hunting down the traitor into a secondary job for more pay.
- Kia

- I should point out that killing someone for a mistake is a bad idea. Slip-ups occur, and a little forgiveness can be divine. It's the ones who are out to set you up that end up catching a bullet for your trouble. The only question is whether it'll be you who delivers it, or some other sucker down the line.
- Red Anya

- Honor among thieves, or else.
- Sunshine

STRESS

A conscience? Nah. Not you, killer. But there's a lot of burnout in this trade, and it comes from taking insufficient time out for yourself, away from the grind. The pressure and mental effort of the job can make you sloppy if you don't relax between missions. I've known a few spooks and samurai who like to meditate to keep clear. It's a great exercise to stay sharp, especially before a snipe job, and it keeps the head clear during planning. But everyone needs a break now and again. I mentioned taking time off before, a chance for the heat to die down. That's when you should be on vaca-

PROFESSIONAL DEVIATIONS

A dedicated assassin makes big money and brings in big heat, meaning plenty of downtime. While some are content to live off their earnings in style or hone their skills, more restless souls can find alternative employment to fill the calendar. Some even find they prefer these variations of use for their skillset and make it a full-time job.

Consultant: Just as some shadowrunners take side contracts as Red Teams to challenge security and find holes to plug, hitmen can find work scouting and securing territories for clients who think they might become a target. The same networking and research skills that assassins cultivate to take someone down give them an eye for how other assassins think. Those insights are worth quite a bit to give bodyguards and security forces the edge they need to keep the client alive.

Proactive Bodyguard: Some assassins take security work a step further, becoming the wolf that hunts other wolves. Their familiarity with the opposition, sometimes even specific faces, gives an extra advantage, as the assassin supplements security with active overwatch. Sometimes networking can even tip off word of an upcoming move on their client, allowing them to eliminate the threat before it gets too close.

Info Broker: Someone once said, "An assassin is just a spy who can pull the trigger." That same set of skills and network of contacts can provide a constant influx of useful data for resale. What's more, collecting data ahead of time can provide a head start for future jobs, with stockpiled records of blueprints and datascape backdoors.

Shadowrunning: There is no reason an assassin cannot put their myriad skills to work in the shadows with its greater variety of employment. In addition to the expected pay, this puts them in touch with Mr. Johnsons who might have more jobs in their specific area of expertise, as well as runners who might be up to help with the ancillary work surrounding a hit.

Insider Trading: This is more a companion piece to kick art. The hitman who can find out who his employer is and why they want the target dead can make some extra money if they think there's a way to gamble on it. Killing a CEO to destroy their market shares? Short the market. That kind of thing. Sure, shadowrunners can dabble in this as well, but with an assassin's narrow focus and knowledge of when someone specific is going to die, they have much more assurance that the investment will pay off the way they want it to.

TERMS OF THE TRADE

Cleaner: A specialist who disposes of corpses, as well as other incriminating evidence. Some can restore a crime scene to pristine order, erasing all evidence of previous wrongdoing.

Game: A particular common scenario and set of tactics for completion of an assassination, con, etc.

Mark: The target of an assassination.

Sanction: A contract placed by a government or megacorporate client.

Territory: The area in which a planned assassination takes place.

Triggerman, Torpedo, Hatchet Man, Apache, Matador, Kick Artist, Mechanic: An assassin.

Zero, Erase, Punch, Equalize, Hit, Clip: To perform an assassination.

tion, whether taking in the sights in another continent or renting out the penthouse suite and having a love-in. Whatever takes your fancy, a sabbatical between jobs keeps you fresh and motivated.

- Mercs can tell you the same thing. High-pay, high-risk work means building in morale breaks to maintain optimal efficiency. If you have a unit, sometimes this means breaking up and getting some time to yourself, or making the most of it for team-building. The CO has to play it by ear. For an individual, I usually suggest something that gets them back in the world and away from the job. This is harder than it looks for task-oriented people, but knowing how to unwind is part of the job.
- Picador

- Isn't it kinda risky to go globe trotting after a big hit, though?
- Hard Exit

- With corporate borders what they are, it's easier than you might think. Plus, if the job is done right, you haven't got any pursuers.
- Traveler Jones

THE BURN

I mentioned getting rid of any incriminating evidence that links you to the kill earlier, but you might be overlooking some elements of the job. It's easy to get greedy and try to keep as many toys as you can. You're welcome to try. But in the age of molecular scanners, surveillance states, ritual samples, and Awakened cops, the long-lived assassin isn't greedy, but careful.

First, the body. Most of the time it's not your problem what happens with a corpse. Bang bang, walk away, and everyone knows Marcus M. Mark got shot to death. No big mystery. And if it's supposed to look like they died of natural causes, in their sleep, or by other non-suspicious circumstances, then it's actually necessary for their corpse to be found. This is important for when someone needs to inherit something, for example. But there may be times when it's part of your job to vanish them for good.

There have been tricks to getting rid of a body since clandestine murder was first considered. Arguably the simplest is just a matter of delivering the body to a place where it won't be found. Sealed in a barrel and dumped in the river, buried in a soy field, holed up in a basement wall, or ditched in the darkest parts of the sewers, you can find places for bodies to end up where they almost certainly won't be found for years, if ever. If you're in a hurry and don't have many resources to spare for it, this can be the way to go.

I'm a believer in actively destroying a body. Technique and technology have made this pretty simple. Sure, you can cremate it or chop it up in pieces or dissolve it in a bathtub in the barrens if you're feeling nostalgic for the twentieth century, but these days there are so many better ways of going about it. If you have magic at hand, a Turn to Goo spell is an excellent way to get rid of a body. Just turn them to jelly, parse it out, and rinse it down a few drains. Leave the water running for a long while to make sure it's well on its way and fully diluted before you stop. All that will be left to find is a collection of polluted, disassociated wads of almost unrecognizable flesh. The flipside is Petrify. Break them down into powder and rinse again. The technological equivalent is a dose of nanites. While shrikes are great for combat, an injection of them with a longer charge than normal can literally turn a body into slurry, bones, heart and all.

You can also subcontract this kind of work. You might be thinking you'll turn a profit if you dump the body with Tamanous or a body bank somewhere, but that's greedy, reckless thinking. You never know where something will turn up, and a trail is a trail. The only kind of reliable sale you can make is to the Infected, ghouls specifically. Sure, a banshee might suck out their soul and bleed them dry, but a ghoul will strip flesh from bones and suck the marrow out of those, too. Even if they leave the skeleton intact somehow (which is doubtful), it'll be lodged in a warren somewhere, where it can reliably stay safe until someone finds and flushes it out. And there'll still be no link to you, by then.

A more professional outfit is extant in any major metroplex. Sometimes they are Cleaners, mopping up the whole scene so you don't have to. More expensive as a service, but if you want to zero your trail, indispensable, especially when a job that needs to be clean goes

wrong and leaves a mess. What's more, they can work on a tight schedule more often than not. Take the time to get to know one or two anywhere you work. It's a chunk out of your credit, but well worth the investment to stay clear and collect your pay.

- Tamanous has made use of ghouls for Cleaner services for years, acting as a fixer service to connect them with clients. Their dual nature makes it easy to find every potential ritual sample, and there's no question as to where the material ends up.
- Hannibelle

- There was a time I was holed up in an isolated section of the Ork Underground to bleed off some heat after a hairy run. Staying off the radar put me in ghoul country. Things got worse when some Cutters decided to start some trouble. I managed to kill two of them before the others retreated, but it was only a matter of time before they came back. So, I went to the ghouls with two bodies and used them to buy the protection of the ghouls. When the Cutters came back, they bit off more than they could chew. From the sounds afterward, so did the ghouls.
- 2XL

- Gross. Is there a lesson here?
- /dev/grrl

- Bodies are worth their weight to the right party.
- Butch

A professional disposal expert might also be a Cleaner, or a dedicated specialist. The real artists get creative. I've noticed the cleanest methods usually involve animals somehow. There's one in the PCC who uses chicken droppings. She digs a pit in loose gravel, like in a backwood road or farm, and covers the body in the shit, then covers it back up. Aeration and rain can dissolve the body in mere weeks, and the smells are neutralized, at least in the of the surrounding odors. Another little operation in the Seattle Barrens uses a farm of captured devil rats. Fifty of the little bastards can consume every scrap of flesh off a troll in an hour. Pigs are more of a classic popularized by the movies, but try finding an unsecured pig farm in a metroplex nowadays.

More often, you need to think about your gear. Sure, you've got a beautiful sniper rifle, but it's connectable to a major murder, and you're not going to be able to smuggle it home. So what do you do? The greedy will think to sell it. Sure, you could sterilize it, but it wouldn't be the first time a hot weapon ended up resold. After all, who is going to buy assassin gear except someone planning to similar chaos? And if they screw up, it'll end up in the wrong hands. But wait, I can hear you asking, won't that mean they'll take the fall for my misdeeds?

Think for a moment. How would you feel about buying hot guns? Would you be pissed to discover you've been saddled with assassination charges in addition to the rest of your rap sheet? Wouldn't you be willing to sell out the no-good asshole who sold you this historical iron? Sure you would! And the trail back to the assassin begins. There are a dozen dozen ways and more that I don't know about that investigators can use to follow that trail to you, by hook or by crook. It's not worth the heat. If you absolutely *must* have the cash from it, you can strip the whole thing apart, use it for parts, etc. I've heard a lot of thoughts about it, but none of them are any good.

So how do you dispose of this weapon? Well, it's not all that different from disposing of a body, only it's slightly easier. You see, melted plastics and metals don't carry the risk of genetic fragments, and not nearly as much psychic spoor to track back. Take the whole thing to its smallest pieces and melt them in acid. Use magic if you have it. One killer I know who takes his personal craftsmanship very seriously likes to take burner guns and melt them down to make ammo for future work. There's a funny poetry in that.

- He fails to mention it, but it can be necessary to get rid of digital gear as well. You're not going to do a hit with a cyberdeck and then melt it down, but it might be necessary to do a full system re-register just to keep the dogs off your data trail. Then again, if you're any kind of decker, you should have been doing this all along.
- Bull

- Ditto for commlinks, though I think it's easier to just toss the burner into a homeless dude's cup. Nothing beats a false trail for buying time.
- Slamm-0!

THE REP

You might be wondering, "If I have to keep all records of my involvement in a kill secret, how am I supposed to build a rep?" That's fair. Nobody likes a one-hit wonder. Let me put your mind at ease: There is a difference between a reputable assassin and a famous one.

The reputable assassin builds their reputation purely by word-of-mouth. A good fixer is going to get more contracts, and they will be the one with the reputation for getting work done through you. They'll vouch for you, but won't say what jobs you specifically have completed, only that you have the skills necessary for the task at hand. The best employers won't go looking for your résumé and won't fish for anecdotes. If they do, you're probably the subject of a security sting, and your professional tact will keep you in the clear. If they look crooked, get up and walk away. It's on them for looking unprofessional, and it's never worth the risk. In other words, your fixer is your filter and your shield. Pay them well for good

work. The famous assassin is in danger if they are a lone gunman. You don't need a fixer in this case, but you have to worry about being recognized by everyone with any interest, including the task force you have no doubt attracted. Famous assassins make the news, so there's a lot of political capital in being the one to take you down.

- Assassins like this can be found on "Top Ten Most Wanted" lists and the like, usually with cash for information leading to the arrest.
- Sticks

- Actually bringing them in is discouraged, though. They want the glory for themselves.
- Kay St. Irregular

- What was that about a task force?
- Ecotope

- Assassinations are statistically more likely to make headlines than terrorist attacks.
- Sunshine

- Why?
- Ecotope

- Priority. A terrorist attack on equipment is often covered up to prevent loss of public faith in the company and stock, which includes the public safety which is the business of private security providers like Lone Star and Knight Errant. Assassinations remove people, often famous and influential, forever, and that can only be covered up for so long.
- Mr. Bonds

- More than that, security companies like assassins better than terrorists because they are high-profile but more likely to be alone. Storming a terror cell usually involves walking into a lot of traps. An assassin wants to live. Less resources to find them.
- Hard Exit

- And the public investment/gain ratio is much higher. When you shoot terrorists, you're talking about politics, and that gets messy and divisive. One man's ecoterrorist is another's freedom fighter. Just look at the Yucatan. But assassins? They're mercenary murderers, obvious bad guys. Catching them is just good press.
- Dr. Spin

- Ergo, more likely to have a task force.
- Hard Exit

Chimera is a fine example of this. Sure, as an organization they are famous, but their individual assassins are cloaked behind the aegis of the group. When you call on their services, you don't have a face or a name, just a guild that absorbs the credit and the blame. It's one more layer between the killer and the forces that will pursue them.

The other side of this is how others who aren't looking to employ you will see you. It helps to have a cover, to keep this side of your life as invisible from everyone as possible. The classic importer/exporter still works and fits the bill. But for those who do know, an assassin is not a very sympathetic character. A shadowrunner might be a romantic Robin Hood-type, sticking it to The Man. Ditto for go gangers or neo-anarchists. But the assassin's stock and trade is death, and since almost all fear is tied into our perception of death, we are objects of fear. And people like to destroy what they are afraid of. On top of that, there are the bleeding hearts who won't do business with you because they feel that makes them culpable, too.

- That logic collapses in on itself when you consider the source of most consumer goods in the world.
- Am-Mut

BRAND IDENTITY AND SIGNATURES

Plenty of young assassins want to make a name for themselves. It's not easy when you're trying to stay anonymous and enjoy a long career, but the two most common ways to do it are to develop a signature or shape a brand identity (and yes, they are different).

A signature, much like the specializations I mentioned earlier, makes what you do stand out. Unlike a specialization, however, it is unique, hard to duplicate, and not as obvious as a distinctive look. It's the kind of thing that is recognized after the fact. Sometimes this takes the form of a calling card, some little prop. I've seen everything from the classic ace of spades to engraved and monogrammed stationary. There's also the trinket route, like some classic Gentleman Thief leaving a little statue in place of what they stole. The Piper left a small, hand-carved flute. A young, classy, and now dead Styx would leave a little bottle of champaign. A young Tír sniper would sign her rounds "Memento Mori." And the Matrix's own technomancer boogeyman Pax left cards on her victims that read, "Pax Vobiscum."

There are other ways to leave your mark that aren't quite signing your shots. There was an elven hitter in the early '50s by the name of Nex who was a big fan of Deathrattle venom. Before he was outed on Shadowland, people just knew he had something special in the can. Afterwards, people always suspected him of doing the deed when someone else used the poison.

- "Memento mori," roughly translated, is Latin for "Remember (that you have) to die." "Pax vobiscum" means "Peace be with you." "Nex," meanwhile, means "Violent death."
- Red

- Latin: It's not just for mages anymore.
- Ethernaut

- Specified methods of killing people seems like a very good way to get mistaken for a serial killer.
- /dev/grrl

- Well, if you consider the motivation as financial gain, any assassin can be made to fit that criteria.
- Picador

MEPHISTOPHELEX ENTRY: SERIAL KILLER

Technical stuff first. You want to be called a serial killer, you have to have at least three victims, and they can't all be at the same time or in a row. You have to kill, cool down, then kill again. Then, to make it clear that you're a bleeding psychopath, you have to kill because you need to, because you have so much psychological pressure urging you to kill, you can't resist it.

When kind of psychological pressure? Often sexual, because what kind of psychosis is complete without that angle, but also misplaced or free-floating anger, the thrill of the kill, a need for attention, or even an attempt to make some cash.

While the trids and scandal sheets really like it when a serial killer has a pattern, like similar victims or a signature method of killing, that is sometimes, but not always, the case. Look, some serial killers have neither the intellect nor the patience to be painstaking and thorough, so they just go out and kill, generally selecting a target based in availability and ease rather than any other factors. There are enough of the classic types—the ones who select a victim related to their need, and whose compulsion or desire for fame leads them to follow a certain pattern on a kill—to fuel a thousand cop shows.

To sum up: These are scary, sick sons of bitches. But not as scary as the people who obsess over them, visit them in prison even though they never met them before, or propose to them. Together, they're the perfect couple to make you wish the beady-eyed guy in the barrens street corner preaching about the imminent end of the world would finally be right.

That's the dark side of the signature: It can be forged. If you get a task force on you for a few too many close calls, another hitter can use your sig to throw the scent onto you. And if you're under the radar and off the grid like a good little shadow operative, how can you prove otherwise? Of course, nothing is stopping you from doing the same to your fellow killer, but it's considered bad form.

- Rumor has it some assassin guilds or bands have created false killer personas. The group uses a distinct method of killing and lets it gain some attention. They formulate an entire false assassin for the authorities to chase while they drop in now and again to use the fake killer's signature to keep them looking in the wrong direction. It's a risky gambit, but I hear it pays off.
- Plan 9

- It's been working well in the intelligence world for years.
- Thorn

- Don't encourage him.
- Glitch

The signature is a quick and fairly easy way to establish a reputation, but its subversion and dependence on props leaves it pretty open. The long and solid route is to make a brand. This extends off the limit aspect of your reputation. What kind of jobs do you want to be known for? Do you leave a trail of corpses, or pass in and out of impenetrable compounds like a ghost, leaving one mark cold in your wake? Are your exploits high-flying, low-tech, or specialized? This kind of branding means people know what they are getting when they hire you, and it also affords a little security when someone tries to frame you.

Think about it: Let's say you're the clean type. Zero residual presence, minimum bodycount, real cloak-and-dagger type. Someone comes along and whacks a politician with a lot of bullets and booms. No one is looking at you. On the other hand, as I've said before, no one is going to come looking for you to hire you when they want work outside your preferred methods. Don't get that sour look—you want that. Do the jobs you can accomplish your way.

Of course, you might like the reputation that you can get the job done no matter what. I can hear you thinking it right now. "Master of all the killing arts." I've actually heard some young buck say that. Once I got done rolling my eyes, I gave him the piece of advice I'll give you: Your brand isn't your method, it's your style. Even if your style is just getting the job done, no matter the odds.

- Anybody else get the distinct impression he's talking about himself?
- Kat o' NineTales

IN PACE REQUISAT

I could fill megapulses and megapulses or however you measure data now about this topic, but the fact is, the art of killing for money isn't that complex. It's been done since the concept of gain by murder first arose in some monkey's head, and it'll stick around forever. I'm sure back then it was as simple as a rock in a quiet place. Sometimes it still is. All that has changed is the complexity, same as the rest of civilization.

- I still have to wonder at what clicks in a person's mind where they're cool with premeditated murder. I mean, if I blow some guys head off when he's coming at me, that's one thing. This is something else entirely.
- /dev/grrl

- Ahh, the folly of youth.
- Bull

- Time is the only finite resource. Youth is simply wealth.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- It doesn't hurt when you're an elf.
- Red

- Or a vampire.
- Slamm-0!

- Now now, boys ...
- Netcat

- Can I just point out for one moment that I'm older now than Slamm-0! was when he started running?
- /dev/grrl

- It's psychodigital imprinting. When we meet someone for the first time, we immediately form an impression of them, which can be hard to shake even after years or decades of association. In the Matrix it's been proven to be even harder, since those impressions have no changing physical analogue. You'll be stuck as the eternal student.
- Kia

- Guess it's time to make a different impression ...
- /dev/grrl

- There's nothing wrong with a personal code. Not everything has to have a price, including your conscience.
- Winterhawk

- Being squeamish at the sight of a little blood isn't going to make the world a better place.
- Jimmy No

- Exactly. Like he says, once someone puts a mark on you, you're already dead. There's not much point in fighting it.
- Sticks

- So, you're saying that the world is how it is, and we'll never be able to change that? It's exactly that attitude that makes the megacorps invulnerable. Acquiescence, or worse, obedience.
- Aufheben

- Are you so naive as to think a shadowrun is anything but paid obedience? Shadow ops aren't anti-establishment rebellion, they're subsidized corporate terrorism, and they don't mean shit to a bottom line, in the end.
- Clockwork

- What about the lives they impact? Workers who lose jobs, and in this case, the poor bastards who lose their lives? What happens to their families?
- Netcat

- That's the risk when you're a corporate drone. No such thing as a safe life, not for anyone.
- Jimmy No

- Their choice. Wrong place, wrong time. They'd walk over each other's corpses for a promotion. I don't have any problem walking over theirs for my payday.
- Clockwork

- I find it hard to believe anyone could be quite this callous. How do you think the species has persevered this long if we're all just out to kill each other to get ahead? You think a social contract could continue to hold us together if we really lived in the dog-eat-dog world you describe?
- Aufheben

- Be as naive as you want. More than likely it'll get you killed in the end.
- Jimmy No

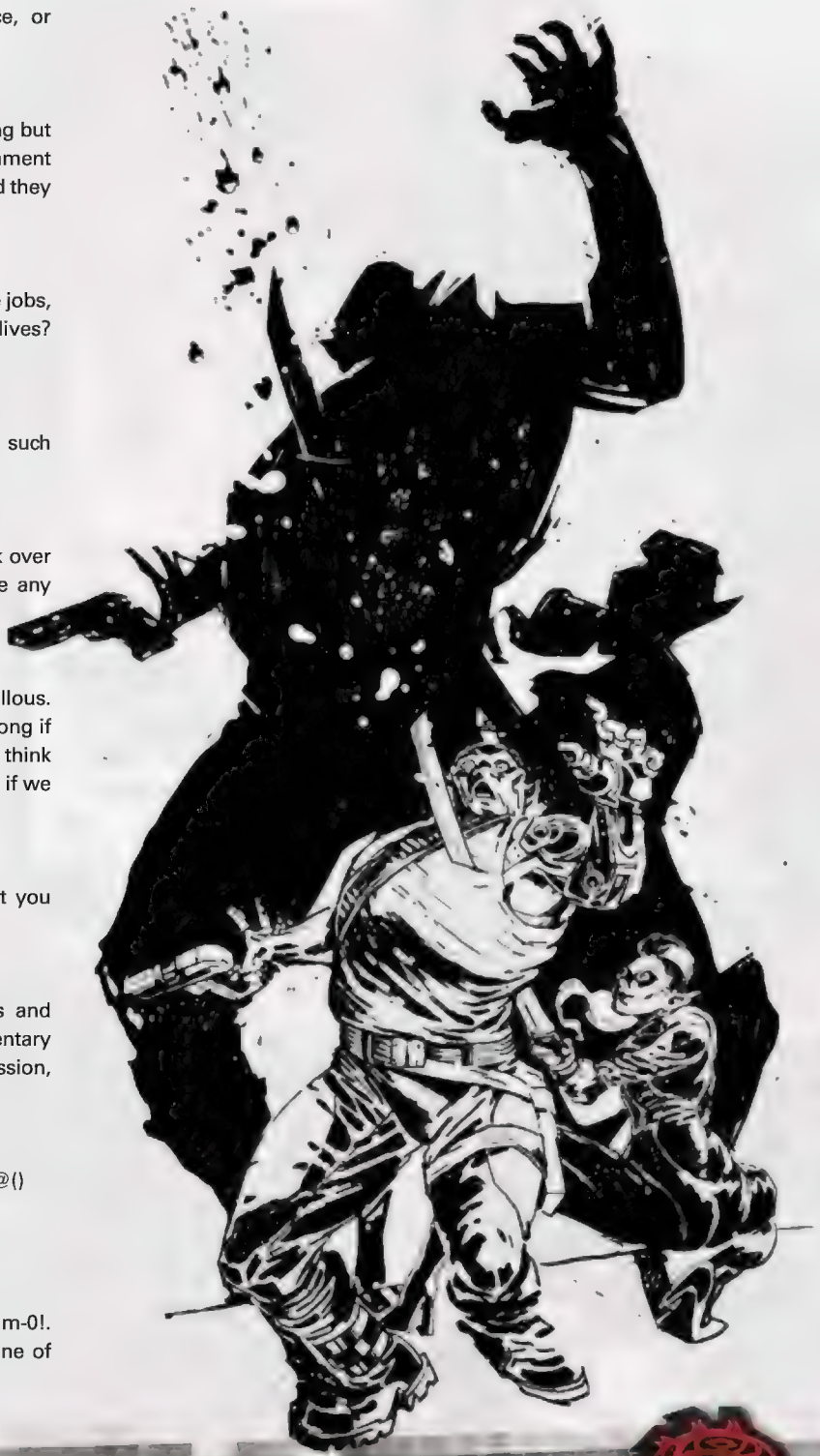
- I can see a half dozen of you writing responses and everyone else watching. I'm shutting this commentary down now. If you want a socio/philosophical discussion, take it to another room. Otherwise, you get IC'd.
- Glitch

- Fuck this white-hat bull$#!ttaasbdaufao@)*$^&(&$@()
- Clockwork

- **Clockwork has been booted**

- I'm surprised you're not laughing like an idiot, Slamm-0!. Haven't you been waiting for an excuse to drop one of those Diaper Bombs on him?
- Bull

- It's times like this I wish we still had 'Jack around to give his two cents.
- Slamm-0!



THE WETWORK TOOLKIT

A WORKMAN IS ONLY AS GOOD AS HIS TOOLS

A drill instructor will have you strip down and rebuild your service rifle until you can do it blindfolded. A martial arts master will teach their student to make a weapon an extension of their body. An assassin is no different. The weapons they choose vary greatly depending on the skillset of the individual and the nature of the job. Here are some things that are available—choose well.

WEAPONS

CAVALIER ARMS ADDER SLIVERGUN

(LIGHT PISTOL)

Oddly enough, this gun was developed as a lightweight personal protection weapon for a mail-delivery corp. Management's logic was that flechette ammo would be more effective against aggressive dogs and similar paracritters while being less intimidating to customers. It is reminiscent of a pared-down Ares Viper Slivergun. With the modification of an aftermarket silencer, this gun is exceptionally handy for sneaking into a location and striking while the target's guard is down.

CAVALIER ADDER SLIVERGUN

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
5	8P(f)	+5	SA	—	20(c)	7F	320¥

COLT MANHUNTER

(HEAVY PISTOL)

Falling a distant third place between the constant advertising battle between the Savalette Guardian and the Ares Predator V, Colt has taken a different track with the latest iteration of the Manhunter. Removing the smartlink and the associated features like electronic safety and clip ejection, and shifting everything back to traditional mechanical mechanisms with the exception of a holographic sight (p. 181). The worst a hacker can do is make you slightly less accurate with this gun and that appeals to a lot of the less technologically minded consumers. While production numbers are currently significantly smaller than its competitors, it is still readily available and a common sight on the streets.

COLT MANHUNTER

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
5 (6)	8P	–1	SA	—	16(c)	5R	700¥

LEMAT 2072

(HEAVY PISTOL)

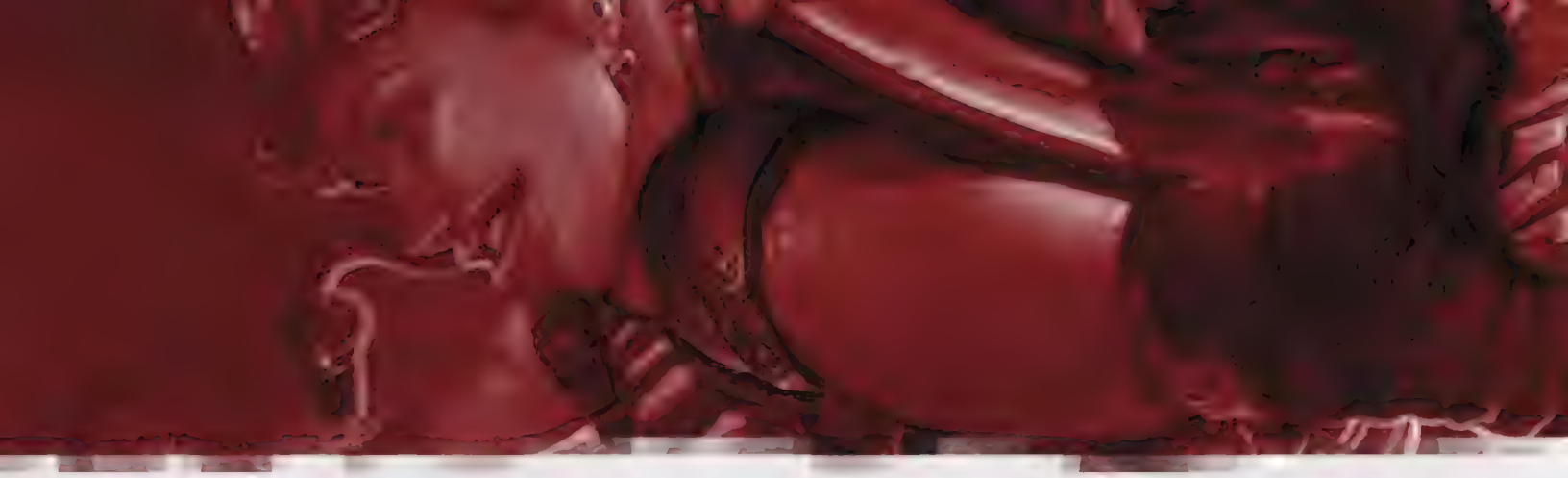
This surprising offering from Krupp Arms is a throwback to the rare pistol used in the Confederacy during the Civil War. This pistol uses a double-barrel design with the cylinder rotating around a large central chamber that holds a single 20-gauge shotgun shell (most commonly loaded with a flechette round). A bit large for human hands with a strong kick, it fits well in larger metahuman hands. This design combined with the Kriegfaust has some speculating that Krupp may be trying to compete with Krime for the metahuman weapons market. Switching the firing mode to fire the central shotgun chamber requires a Simple Action. This function is controlled by the custom-built ammo skip system included with this model. *Wireless bonus*: Switching the fire mode becomes a Free Action.

LEMAT 2072 (REVOLVER BARREL)

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
5	8P	–1	SS	—	9(cy)	8R	1,080¥

LEMAT 2072 (SHOTGUN BARREL)

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
5	10P(f)	+4	SS	—	1(b)		



PLASTEEL TOE BOOTS

Common safety wear for most dangerous jobs, these also do for your feet what knucks do for your hands (meaning kick attacks deal physical damage). These boots are used by corp security and gangers alike. While highly protective, they are too big and clunky to be helpful while being stealthy. Auditory Perception Tests against you receive a +1 dice bonus.

PLASTEEL TOE BOOTS

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
[Phys]	(Str+1)P	—	—	2	200¥

SAPPHIRE KNIFE

This knife is made from a single large synthetic sapphire. While it is nearly as hard as diamond and sharper than a razor, on a critical glitch the blade can shatter. Due to the material of this blade, it is undetectable by MAD scanners. Available in a variety of colors determined by the trace elements included in the crystal matrix including blue, yellow, purple, orange or red. (Did you know rubies are actually just red sapphires? Nothing says style like killing someone with a ruby.)

CERAMIC/PLASTEEL KNIFE

Ceramic knives are lightweight and nonmetallic that are primarily sold as specialty tools. Divers use them because they are resistant to salt water corrosion, and explosive defusing experts use them because they are nonmetallic and will not trigger bombs with magnetic anomaly detectors. Plasteel knives share most characteristics with ceramic knives, including being undetectable to MAD scanners. They are most commonly handmade from scraps taken from machinery or vehicles. A few designs are mass manufactured, but generally ceramic is the preferred medium due to superior edge retention under heavy use. Both are equally useful to a shadowrunner who wants to sneak a blade into a secure area.

SAPPHIRE KNIFE

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
5	(STR+2)P	-3	—	6R	900¥

CERAMIC/PLASTEEL KNIFE

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
5	(STR+1)P	-1	—	4	75¥

DYNAMIC TENSION BOW

For most people, their Strength is a fixed factor. For those with magic on their side, Strength can vary dramatically. For archers that like to pump themselves up magically, a compound bow was developed with dynamic pulley adjustment that allows a variable draw strength. This bow functions similarly to a compound bow, but the Rating can be changed from 1 through 10 as a Simple Action. *Wireless bonus*: Changing the Rating becomes a Free Action.

DYNAMIC TENSION BOW

ACC	DV	AP	AVAIL	COST
5	(Rating + 2)P	-(Rating/4)	12	1,200¥

VICTORINOX COLLAPSIBLE HATCHET

This offering is an attempt by Victorinox to capitalize on the success of the Urban Tribe Tomahawk. This hatchet has a more traditionally European influence in style. It is designed more for survival and melee combat as opposed to its competitor, which is designed for throwing. The hatchet can fold down as a Simple Action to a small enough size to fit in a pocket. *Wireless bonus*: Folding or unfolding the hatchet is a Free Action.

COUGAR COLLAPSIBLE SPEAR

VICTORINOX COLLAPSIBLE HATCHET

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
5	(STR+2)P	-1	1	4	250¥

The main drawback of any polearm is concealability. With this product from Cougar, that is no longer a problem. In collapsed form, it appears to be a standard fixed-blade knife and functions identically to one. With a Standard Action, the memory steel alloy handle extends to allow the weapon to function as a standard polearm. When extended, the spear can also be thrown (using the Throwing Weapons skill, dealing the same damage as in melee, and having the same range as a Throwing Knife). *Wireless bonus:* Extending the handle is a Free Action.

WEAPON MODIFICATIONS

COLLAPSED SPEAR

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
5	(STR+1)P	-1	0	14R	1,250¥

EXTENDED SPEAR

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
5	(STR+3)P	-2	3	—	—

AMMO SKIP SYSTEM

This modification is made specifically for shooters who want to use multiple types of ammo and have them ready to fire at a moment's notice. This mod can be applied to any weapon with a cylinder or drum magazine. As a Simple Action the system rotates the cylinder or drum to the chamber holding rounds of the wielder's choice. Wireless bonus: Switching between ammo types is a free action.

CERAMIC/PLASTEEL COMPONENTS

This modification replaces the metal components of a gun with ceramic and plasteel components to increase the difficulty of detecting the weapon via MAD systems. This modification contributes a modifier equal to -1 per point of Rating (maximum Rating 6) to the MAD scanner's dice pool when it rolls an attempt to detect the weapon. This modification is not compatible with any other modification that involves complex electronics, such as a smartlink or chameleon coating, because the electronics require a significant amount of metallic components. The cost of this modification is equal to the base cost of the gun being modified multiplied by the Rating.

CHAMELEON COATING

A coating of ruthenium polymers is added to the weapon. A character wearing an outfit with active optical camouflage and carrying a weapon larger than Heavy Pistol size needs this modification to receive the bonus of the camouflage, as even the dumbest corpsec guard can figure out that rifles don't usually float across the room on their own. This modification applies a -2 Concealability modifier to a weapon that can be wielded with one hand, -1 to one that is wielded with two.

CUSTOM LOOK

Anyone can threaten someone with a gun, but some look more frightening than others. Some guns send the message that the wielder is no ordinary thug, and crossing them would be a bad idea. This modification can include a wide array of possible enhancements including filigree, engraving, grips made from exotic materials, and chrome or gold plating. Weapons with Custom Look grant a +1 dice pool bonus to Intimidation Tests. The downside is that guns like this stand out and people get a +1 on Memory Tests to recall seeing the wielder.

EASY BREAKDOWN

With this modification, weapons can be modified to easily break down to pieces small enough to be easily hidden. A rifle might fit into a large briefcase, while the parts of a pistol might serve as pieces of jewelry. Just don't try to hide a machine gun in a violin or guitar case—Hollywood has run that trope into the ground for well over a century. Manual easy breakdown means that the weapon can be broken down or assembled in 3 Complex Actions. Powered easy breakdown means that the weapon can be broken down or assembled in 2 Complex Actions.

ELECTRONIC FIRING

With this modification, most of the weapon's moving parts are removed so that it can fire electronically, meaning that an electrical signal detonates the bullet's propellant. This provides 1 point of recoil compensation and a -1 dice pool modifier to sound-based Perception Tests when trying to locate where the weapon is being fired from. Electronic firing is usually combined with trigger removal (see p. 182) to further reduce the number of moving parts, but this is not mandatory. The weapon still includes a loading mechanism that moves the bullet into the chamber, and it requires caseless ammunition.

EXPLOSIVE MAGAZINE

A spare magazine with a micro-sized grenade charge built into the bottom. Functions as a standard grenade of that type, though any damage is halved due to miniaturization. It must be thrown as a Throwing Weapon; it is not a bullet-sized grenade. Sorry. Magazine capacity is reduced by 2.

EXTENDED CLIP

Sometimes the job calls for the ability to fire more shots without taking time to reload. That is what an extended

clip is for. A Rating 1 Extended Clip adds fifty percent more rounds to the gun's capacity, and a Rating 2 Extended Clip adds one hundred percent more rounds. The only downside is it makes a gun a bit harder to hide (+1 Concealability per Rating). More of an accessory than a modification, an Extended Clip does not use any modification slots.

HOLOGRAPHIC SIGHT

Offers the same benefits as a laser sight without the red trail of light giving away the position of the shooter. In addition, the holographic (or holo) sight can display basic information such as range to target or remaining ammo without the wielder using AR. The only downside is the necessary top mount sometimes gets in the way, making quick draw attempts require 1 extra success (p. 165, *SR5*).

LONGBARREL

This modification involves replacing the stock barrel with a longer one thereby increasing bullet velocity. Increase Accuracy by 1, while increasing the Concealability modifier by +1.

MACHINE PISTOLS AND EXTENDED CLIPS

Several Machine Pistols are considered to have a Rating 1 Extended Clip as a standard feature. This includes the Ares Crusader II, Ceska Black Scorpion, PPSK-4 Collapsible Machine Pistol, and Steyr TMP. That means that a Rating 1 extended clip cannot be added to these models, and a Rating 2 extended clip only increase capacity by fifty percent.

MELEE HARDENING

Strongly favored by practitioners of the Gun Kata martial art and helpful for anyone who is rough on their firearms, melee hardening reinforces the firearm's me-

chanical and electrical components to protect them from damage from hard impacts, such as when the firearm is used as an improvised melee weapon.

MOUNTED CROSSBOW

This modification entails mounting a crossbow on top of an assault rifle or a longarm. It may sound like an absurd notion, but it is nice to have the ability to fire one silent kill shot and have a weapon in hand should your kill not be as silent as you hoped. Even if the modified weapon looks kind of ugly. This modification uses both the barrel and underbarrel mod slot and uses the Archery skill to fire.

MOUNTED CROSSBOW

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
8	7P	–2	SS	—	1	—	—

OVERCLOCKED

Only applicable to melee weapons that deal electrical damage

Electricians have a saying: It is not the voltage that will kill you but the amperage. Electrical weapons stun but do not kill because they are designed to generate extremely high voltage but low amperage. This illegal modification changes the balance of voltage and amperage output, making these weapons potentially lethal. Change the weapon's damage from Stun to Physical and reduce the Damage Value by 2. On a critical glitch, the insulation of the weapon fails and the wielder takes the full base damage from the weapon. It is highly recommended for anyone using this modification to also add the Nonconductivity modification to their armor. Note: As with all Physical damage, if the damage does not exceed the target's Armor, it is taken as Stun.

PERSONALIZED GRIP

This modification allows a weapon's owner to customize a weapon to fit the size and shape of their hand perfectly. This is particularly useful for metatypes at the high and low end of the bell curve for standard metahuman size. This modification increases a weapon's Accuracy by 1.

RETRACTABLE BAYONET

This modification adds an underbarrel sheath that conceals a retractable bayonet. The bayonet can be extended as a simple action or as a free action if you have a wireless connection. When attached to a weapon and extended, it has Reach 2, DV (STR +1)P, and AP –1.

SAWED OFF/SHORTBARREL

This common modification reduces damage by 1 but increases Concealability by 1. Eliminates the gun's ability to mount barrel modifications. If combined with stock removal, the Accuracy is also reduced by 1 in addition to the other benefits and penalties listed. Can only be used on Heavy Pistols, Assault Rifles, and all weapons in the Longarms skill group. Shotguns that have had their barrel shortened cannot fire a narrow spread.

STOCK REMOVAL

Removing the stock reduces both the recoil compensation and the Concealability of a gun by 1. Weapon modifications such as a shock pad or any other stock modifications cannot be applied. If combined with sawed off the Accuracy is also reduced by 1 in addition to the other benefits and penalties listed.

TRIGGER REMOVAL

Sometimes the time it takes to move a finger is too long. Sometimes the pressure of squeezing a trigger is enough to throw off the precision of a long range shot. This is the modification for those times. A smartgun system is necessary for trigger removal, since the gun requires a command delivered wirelessly or through an optical cable to fire. This modification adds +1 Accuracy but is not cumulative with any other modification that adds to Accuracy other than the requisite smartlink. Wireless triggering requires wireless to be turned on. In case you were wondering.

UNDERBARREL LASER

Produced by Ares and based on their Redline model, this underbarrel laser was originally deployed for use by Ares strike teams going up against bug spirits. A limited released somehow made it to the streets, but this modification is still quite a rare sight. Blackwing himself is rumored to use one on occasion.

UNDERBARREL LASER

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
8	5P	–10	SA	—	5(c) or external source	—	—

UNDERBARREL SHOTGUN

This classic modification adds a pump action shotgun to an existing longarm, assault rifle, or heavy weapon. After all, if one gun is good, then two must be better. Or at least louder.

UNDERBARREL SHOTGUN

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
8	9P	–1	SS	–1	4(m)	5R	—

WEAPON MODIFICATIONS

MOD	SLOT	THRESHOLD	DURATION	TOOLS	COST	AVAIL	SKILLS
Ammo skip system	Underbarrel	10	1 hour	Shop	250¥	8R	Armorer
Ceramic/plasteel components	—	Rating x 10	1 day	Facility	Special	12 + RatingF	Armorer
Chameleon coating	Side	16	1 day	Shop	1,000¥	10R	Hardware
Custom look	—	8	1 day	Shop	300¥	2	Artisan
Easy breakdown (manual)	Side	18	6 hours	Shop	750¥	8R	Industrial Mechanic
Easy breakdown (powered)	Side	24	1 day	Facility	1250¥	10R	Industrial Mechanic
Electronic firing	Barrel	12	2 hours	Shop	1000¥	10R	Armorer
Explosive clip	—	4	10 minutes	Kit	As grenade + 20¥	As grenade + 2F	Armorer
Extended clip	—	—	—	—	35¥	6R	—
Holographic sight	Top-mount	4	10 minutes	Kit	125¥	2	Armorer
Longbarrel	Barrel	12	1 hour	Shop	Weapon Cost	8R	Armorer
Melee hardening	—	16	6 hours	Facility	500¥	6	Armorer
Mounted crossbow	Barrel and Underbarrel	20	1 day	Facility	1,000¥	8R	Armorer
Overclocked	—	18	1 hour	Shop	200¥	6F	Hardware
Personalized grip	—	6	30 minutes	Shop	100¥	2	Armorer
Retractible bayonet	Underbarrel	6	30 minutes	Kit	200¥	6R	Armorer
Sawed-off/shortbarrel	Barrel	6	30 minutes	Kit	20¥	4R	Armorer
Stock removal	Stock	4	10 minutes	Kit	20¥	2	Armorer
Trigger removal	—	8	30 minutes	Kit	50¥	2	Armorer
Underbarrel laser	Underbarrel and Side	24	6 hours	Shop	22,000¥	16F	Armorer
Underbarrel shotgun	Underbarrel	20	4 hours	Shop	600¥	5R	Armorer

SIGNATURE WEAPONS

Don't you hate it when someone else takes credit for someone you killed? This is a valid concern for an assassin. If there is a price on someone's head, how do you prove you were the one who did the job without actually bringing in aforementioned head as proof? A head in a duffel bag doesn't get through security at the airport as easily as it used to.

One way is to have a signature. The old cliché of the assassin leaving behind a single black rose or an ace of spades works for some. Others take a more direct approach and make the kill using unique means. Quite a few assassins use exotic weapons to stand out from the crowd.

COLLAPSIBLE SCYTHE

Nothing brings the terror of your imminent demise to a peak quite the same way as a shadowy figure wielding a scythe closing in on you. The progenitor of this weapon was a female assassin who goes by the name Keres. There have been a few copycats since, but none as skilled or successful. This weapon is custom made and is essentially a telescoping staff with a Smartsteel blade fused to one end. When collapsed, the staff part compresses together with a telescopic design, and the blade coils inside the end of the shaft. Collapsing or extending the scythe is a Complex Action. When collapsed, the scythe is the same size as a club or baton (0 Concealability modifier) and if inspected noticing the coiled blade can be difficult (-4 Concealability Modifier). Wireless bonus: Collapsing or extending the scythe is a Simple Action.

COLLAPSIBLE SCYTHE

ACC	DV	AP	REACH	AVAIL	COST
5	(Str+2)P	-2	2	16R	2,350¥

FLAME BRACER

This gizmo was invented by a mage who favored the Shape Fire spell but could never find a flame when he needed it. On a critical glitch you hit yourself with the flame. This weapon uses the Exotic Ranged Weapon skill.

FLAME BRACER

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
4	6P(fire)	–6	SS	—	2(c)	8F	775¥

SHIAWASE ARMS SIMOOM

(EXOTIC RANGED WEAPON)

Combining the best of offense and defense, this set of forearm guards (p. 73, *Run & Gun*) offers +1 Armor and has a built in light pistol "Magazine Barrel" on the dominant arm's guard. Firing is a Complex Action. The magazine barrel holds 6 shots that can be fired individually or all at once as full auto fire. The Simoom uses pistol ranges. Full Auto fire takes a -2 penalty from recoil. The offhand guard has one capacity slot that stores a spare barrel magazine (non-firing) standard but can be repurposed with other equipment. The Concelability modifier to hide the true function of the bracer is -4. *Wireless bonus*: Firing is a Simple Action

SHIAWASE ARMS SIMOOM

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
5	6P	—	SA/FA	—	6(ml)	14R	1,500¥

THROWING SYRINGE (EXOTIC)

Originally developed by a street doc who was also a throwing adept, this weapon quickly found fans with assassins due to its ability to deal deadly attacks in an easily concealable package. These aerodynamic throwing needles have an internal compressed reservoir with an inertial trigger. When the darts strike a target, they inject any liquid they contain into the target. If the syringe does not penetrate the armor and the liquid is not contact vector, the target is not affected by the liquid (see **Injection Darts**, p. 434, *SR5*). A character can ready (Agility / 2) of these syringes with one Ready Weapon action. Wireless bonus: If all the Throwing Syringes you throw in a Combat Turn have wireless and you have a smartlink system, each syringe you throw receives a +1 dice pool bonus per syringe thrown that Combat Turn at your current target, as the syringes adjust for wind and other atmospheric conditions. So you'd get no bonus on the first throw, +1 on the second throw, and +2 on the third, etc. (assuming you aimed all three syringes at the same target. If you didn't then no bonus).

THROWING SYRINGE

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AVAIL	COST
[Phys]	(STR–2)P	–2	—	6F	40¥	1,500¥

ARES ARMATUS

A recent experimental prototype "laser shotgun" produced by Ares, this laser weapon uses a beam splitter to fire an array of smaller lasers rather than a single cohesive beam. This weapon has been seen in limited use with Firewatch teams but has not been released for sale on the military arms market. If you are lucky enough to happen across one for sale, consider its condition to be dropped once, never fired. This weapon has the same qualities specific to other laser weapons (p. 47, *Run & Gun*) including increased range penalties and power source needs. The Armatus uses shotgun ranges and can fire narrow, medium, or wide spreads like a normal shotgun.

ARES ARMATUS

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
6	6P	–5	SA	—	10(c) or external source	20F	19,000¥

ARMOR/CLOTHING

CLOAK

From a simple poncho treated to resist Seattle's acid rain to a stylish cloak to accent your evening wear, all sort of variations can be found in the Sixth World. While offering no inherent armor bonus, cloaks are capable of accepting armor modifications—100¥ per point of Rating (maximum 6). Wearers suffer a -1 Social Limit modifier when wearing a cloak. Availability 1. Designer cloaks can be purchased which match popular high fashion outfits for an additional 300¥, an absolute must if you want to avoid a fashion faux pas (they remove the Social Limit penalty). Cloaks provide a -2 Concealability modifier to items completely hidden underneath.

RUTHENIUM POLYMER CLOAK

A hooded cloak infused with ruthenium polymer fibers. Originally developed for military snipers and spotters who needed to remain concealed and stationary for an extended period of time. The sensor suite that replicates the surroundings has difficulty adapting to the rippling of the cloak while the wearer is in motion. Because of this, the cloak is not as effective while moving as RP modified armor, but it is still fully effective standing still. These cloaks are also sometimes used to conceal small,

strategically important objects. Availability 14F, Rating 1 - 4, 4,000¥ per rating. The base modifier to a Perception Test to spot the wearer is -(Rating + 2) while stationary and -(Rating - 1) while moving. (That is right, a Rating 1 RP cloak offers no benefit while moving. You just look like you are wearing a poncho made of static. Which may be fashionable in some places, as there is no accounting for Sixth World taste.) An RP cloak has no capacity for any additional armor modifications.

ARMOR MODIFICATIONS

BIOFIBER POCKET

This pocket is lined with biofiber, a bioengineered form of dual-natured plant life, which blocks Astral Perception of objects contained within the pocket. It is the best way to hide small foci or alchemical preparations from detection by security mages. Active foci cannot be used if they are stored within the pocket. The biofiber is alive and requires a special nutrient solution costing 20¥ a month.

CONCEALED POCKETS

Adds a small secret pocket large enough to hold a hold-out pistol, commlink, or other similarly sized object. It grants a -2 Concealability modifier to that object.

FARADAY POCKET

The armor has a small pocket with a signal-blocking insert. No wireless signals can penetrate this pocket. Cutting off your wireless access to avoid tracking is as simple as dropping your commlink into this pocket.

GEAR ACCESS

This feature allows items to be retrieved from the piece of armor with more ease than usual. This means drawing or retrieving items that are set up on the armor takes one lower action. Complex becomes Simple, and Simple becomes Free. Free stays Free, but gamemasters can consider allowing an extra Free Action for the Action Phase. This modification negates any Social or positive dice pool bonus to any armor it is added to with the exceptions of tests to absorb damage (natch) and tests that specifically effect Intimidation or groups that would not consider being strapped with tactical gear to be out of place.

ARMOR MODIFICATIONS

MOD	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
Biofiber pocket	[2]	10F	700¥
Concealed pockets	[1]	4	40¥
Faraday pocket	[1]	7R	50¥
Gear access	[4]	4	150¥

CYBERWARE/BIOWARE

BILATERAL COORDINATION CO-PROCESSOR (BASIC BIOWARE)

The BCC is a small amount of specialized brain tissue added to the corpus callosum, which balances dexterity between the left and right portions of the body. This augmentation negates 2 points of penalties for using your off hand.

BILATERAL COORD. CO-PROCESSOR

ESS	AVAIL	COST
0.2	6	4,500¥

BIOSPIKE (CULTURED BIOWARE)

This augmentation was developed after a rare genetic pattern was identified following a standard bone lacing procedure. This process grows a single sharp, dense bone spike in the subject with attached musculature to extrude or retract the spike from the subject's forearm. An additional procedure creates a channel within the body and aperture in the skin that prevent damage to the subject when the spike is extended. Without this pocket augmentation, the spike deals 2P unresisted damage to the subject when it is extruded. Bone density augmentation can further increase the damage potential of the spurs (+1 for every 2 points in bone density Rating).

The obvious benefit of this weapon is that it is entirely organic and not detectable by MAD or Cyberware scanners. A Biospike has a concealability modifier of -10.

CULTURED BIOWARE

BIOWARE	ESS	DV	AP	AVAIL	COST
Bone Spur	0.2	(STR + 2)P	—	14F	20,000¥
Spur Pocket	0.1	—	—	6	8,000¥

FOOT BLADE (CYBERWEAPON)

This modification implants a retractable blade into the foot which can be used to deliver devastating kick attacks. Most commonly, the blade comes from the front of the foot or the heel.

FOOT BLADE

ESS	DV	AP	AVAIL	COST
0.2	(STR + 2)P	—	20F	28,000¥

CYBERGLAND (CYBERWARE)

This augmentation is a bit like an auto-injector for those who love sharing. A cybergland is an artificial reservoir that is most commonly installed within cyberlimbs, dermal plating, or other cyberware. It can hold a small amount of fluid, usually a toxin or drug, although more benign substances like pheromones, perfume, or artificial flavorings are possible. With a thought, the reservoir releases its contents in liquid form or as a small puff of aerosolized mist. If installed in conjunction with a cyberweapon, the fluid can be applied when the weapon is fired or unsheathed. If the weapon is a melee weapon, the dose is considered expended after the first successful strike. The cybergland can be refilled through a concealed external port (takes 1 minute). The number of doses a cybergland can hold is equal to the Rating.

CYBERGLAND (1-4)

ESS	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
[0.2 x Rating]	[1 x Rating]	(Rating x 4)R	12,000¥ x Rating

CYBERFINGERS

These are a few of the less common variations of cyberfingers (p. 86, *Chrome Flesh*).

Credsticks: *Always* carry enough hidden nuyen for a quick bribe. Does not come pre-loaded with cash.

Glass cutter: Suitable for cutting conventional glass. Don't expect it to work on Armorglass.

Injector: A small needle extends from the tip of the finger that can hold one dose of a toxin, drug, or other similar substance.

Lockpick: Functions as a standard lockpick set (p. 448, *SR5*).

CYBERFINGERS

VARIANT	ESS	CAP	AVAIL	COST
Credstick	0.05	[1]	4	500¥ + [nuyen]
Glass cutter	0.05	[1]	4	550¥
Injector	0.05	[1]	8F	650¥
Lockpick	0.05	[1]	6R	750¥

INFRASONIC GENERATOR

A modified version of the standard voice modulator, this model adds infrasonic tones as an underlayer to your normal voice. Infrasound hovers at a frequency just at the edge of human hearing, causing feelings of anxiety and fear. When activated, this modification adds its Rating to Intimidation Tests.

INFRASONIC GENERATOR (1-4)

ESS	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
0.2	[2]	Rating x 3F	Rating x 4,000¥

MISCELLANEOUS GEAR

ARES MONOTIP ARROWS

These broadhead arrows are sharpened to a single molecule thickness at the edge and excel at punching through modern armor. They provide -2 AP when used as ammunition.

C-SQUARED

Street slang for "cleaner cleaner," this chemical is a cocktail of industrial cleaning solvents. It is excellent for destroying forensic and material samples that you may have unknowingly left behind. C-Squared adds its Rating to the threshold of any test to find DNA samples in an area treated with it.

ENCHANTING GLOVES

Specially prepared and lined gloves that block an alchemist's personal aura to prevent triggering contact preparations while handling them after their creation. Each pair must be attuned to a specific aura by the creator of the gloves, after which they will only work for that individual.

QUICKDRAW QUIVER

This hard-shelled, protective quiver securely holds up to twenty shafts and allows an archer to wirelessly cycle between various types of arrows/bolts and easily draw the intended shaft.

REACTIVE MYOMER PACK

Commonly used by heavy security forces and combat medics, the reactive myomer pack securely and effectively holds a large amount of gear. With a wireless command, the myomeric filaments in the pack contract and shift the desired item to the opening of the pack, making it quickly and easily retrievable. Storing an item in the pack is a Free Action, as the pack will automatically grab and stow any item held to the opening by the wearer. Removing an item requires a Complex Action. *Wireless bonus*: Retrieving an item from the pack is a Simple Action.

RELOADING RAIL

Attaching to the belt or the bottom of a backpack, this small articulated arm assists in reloading a magazine-fed firearm. A trained shooter can slam home a fresh clip into an empty firearm with one hand as a Free Action. This re-

quires a wireless or DNI connection. The reloading rail can hold up to 4 clips. The reloading rail is not intended for stealth use and has a Concealability modifier of +2. A version of this device is available as a cybertorso accessory.

RELOADING SLIDE

A sort of hybrid between the reloading rail and the hidden arm slide, this device straps to the forearm and with a gesture will insert a clip into an empty clip-fed pistol. This allows shooters who prefer to dual-wield pistols to reload with ease. This device is particularly popular with practitioners of Firefight. It is compatible with all firearms that use the Pistol skill and Machine Pistols that load a clip and do not have an Extended Clip (see sidebar on p. 180). Wireless: You can reload the pistol as a free action. A version of this device is available as a cyberarm accessory.

SEEKER SHAFTS

These arrows have basic guidance software and articulated fletching, which allow some ability to home in on a target. They require a bow to have a smartlink equipped. To use them, an archer must first lock on to a target through their smartlink using a Simple Action. The lock persists until the target is changed or line of sight is broken. The arrow grants a +1 dice pool bonus to attacks and negates up to 2 points of negative situational modifiers such as wind, cover, or movement. Seeker shafts are compatible with any variety of arrow as long as the type only affects the head of the arrow. *Wireless bonus*: Locking onto a target is a Free Action.

SMOKEBOMB

This simple device is a brittle ceramic shell filled with chemicals that react with air to suddenly produce a flash of light and a small cloud of smoke. The sudden flash imparts a -2 dice pool modifier on attack tests for anyone within a 3-meter radius, and the smoke imparts visibility penalties (p. 174, *SR5*) creating moderate smoke (-3 penalty) that fully dissipates after 1 Combat Turn.

TACTICAL GRAPPLE GUN

(EXOTIC RANGED WEAPON)

Similar to the standard issue grapple gun, but with significant improvements for military and security use. These include an integral smartlink with customized software, interchangeable specialized grapple heads, upgraded winch motor, and improved range (uses Heavy Crossbow ranges, p. 476, *SR5*). Grapple heads can be ejected through a smartlink, and replacing them is a Complex Action. This model comes standard with arachnofibre rope (600kg break strength and extremely thin). Other features include:

Harpoon head: Intended to pierce rather than hook. DV 9P, AP -4. (300¥ replacement cost)

Articulated grapnel: Has articulated mechanical "fingers" providing improved gripping ability on difficult surfaces. Reduce surface-related environmental modifiers, such as slickness, by two. (1,000¥ replacement cost)

Sticky grapnel: A thin shell covering that shatters upon contact, releasing a sticky, fibrous material. Allows the head to stick to a flat, dry surface and provide an anchor point as effective as a normal grapnel. Requires industrial solvent to remove. Single use (150¥ replacement cost).

Grenade reel: As a Standard Action, after a grapple head has been affixed to a target the reel can be released from the gun mechanism. It then coils itself automatically, pulling the reel up to where the grapple is affixed. The reel contains space for one minigrenade of the user's choice and can be detonated via wireless command. (750¥ + grenade cost to replace.)

TACTICAL GRAPPLE GUN

ACC	DV	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
4(6)	9S	-2	SS	1	1(b)	15F	10,000¥

ULTRASONIC NOISE GENERATOR

A variation of the standard white noise generator, this model is tuned to ultrasonic frequencies. While inaudible to unaugmented metahumans, it is sufficient to blind ultrasound sensors. Each point of Rating adds one die to the user's Sneaking + Agility test to avoid detection via ultrasound systems.

MISCELLANEOUS GEAR

ITEM	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
Ares Monotip arrows	n/a	8R	30¥ per Rating
C-Squared	n/a	2	Rating (1-6) x 15¥
Enchanting gloves	n/a	8	2,000¥
Quickdraw quiver	n/a	4	500¥
Reactive myomer pack	n/a	6	450¥
Reloading rail	n/a	4R	675¥
Reloading rail (for cybertorso)	[5]	7R	3,500¥
Reloading slide	n/a	3R	300¥
Reloading slide (for cyberarm)	[3]	10R	2,750¥
Seeker shafts	n/a	12F	45¥
Smokebomb	n/a	6	25¥
Ultrasonic noise generator	[2]	2 x Rating	Rating (1-4) x 60¥
Voice warper	[1]	8R	Rating x 250¥

VOICE WARPER

This device filters and warps your voice so that you cannot be recognized by individuals or voice recognition software. The dice pool bonus in resisting such tests is equal to the device Rating. Increases your limit on Intimidation Tests by 1.

DISGUISE GEAR

Getting close to a mark to do your job can be tricky, especially when the mark knows someone is gunning for them. A good disguise can be the right tool for the job. It can be as simple as disguising yourself as a random waiter/waitress or as tricky as impersonating a close friend or relative. In addition, a good disguise comes in handy once a job is over, because no matter how good you are sometimes your cover gets blown and people start baying for your blood.

POLYCHROMIC LENS

(FOR CONTACTS ONLY)

This feature can be added to contacts and allows an individual to change the apparent color and pattern of their retina. The contacts can be changed via wireless connection to any appearance imaginable, though the resolution is not as precise as Retinal Duplication cyberware and cannot fool a biometric reader.

SMART WIG

Designed for fashion, but immensely useful for clandestine operations. This wig can change color, curl or straighten, lengthen or shorten, and shift to a number of preprogrammed hairstyles on command. The wig can transform to any of four styles as a standard action. For an extra 100 nuyen the wig comes with a built-in trode net. Wireless bonus: The wig can transform to any style which can be downloaded from any of several Matrix databases offering basic styles for free and styles worn by famous people offered at premium prices. You can also design your own styles with a Software +Logic [Mental] Test and use them yourself or post them online. Be advised, copying and uploading any trademarked "pay-only" style can cause considerable legal backlash.

SYNTHSKIN FACE MASK

With the popular nanopaste disguise kit falling in popularity due to CFD concerns, the synthskin facemask has taken its market share. It is composed of a programmable electropolymer commonly used in the skin covering of synthetic cyberware and humanoid mimic drones. It produces a lifelike replica of an individual's face. A person's face can be duplicated if you have a scan from a biometric reader (with the dice bonus on the Disguise Test equal to the biometric reader's Rating). A Software + Logic Test (with the dice bonus on the Disguise Test equal to the successes) can replicate a specific individual's face or create a completely unique appearance. In either case, the limit on the test is equal to the Rating of the mask. The mask is reusable in the sense that it can be worn multiple times, but once an appearance has been set in either fashion described above, it cannot be altered.

THEATRICAL COSMETICS KIT

This kit provides various types of makeup, hair dye, temporary facial prosthetics, and other equipment required for creating a disguise or physically impersonating a specific individual. Each kit has enough materials for ten disguises, after which a new kit must be purchased. Unlike a regular Disguise Kit (p. 136, SR5), a theatrical disguise kit does not require an Extended Test, but it also does not provide the extra dice pool bonus such a kit might provide. Instead, it takes a flat duration of ten minutes to apply.

DISGUISE GEAR

ITEM	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
Polychromic lens	(1)	–	100¥
Smart wig	n/a	8	1,200¥
Synthskin face mask	n/a	8	Rating (max 6) x 100¥
Theatrical cosmetics kit	4	300¥	

AMMUNITION

All bullets are made for one purpose, but that does not mean they are all the same. Choosing the right bullet for the job can give you the edge you need to turn failure into success.

DEPLETED URANIUM ROUNDS

The ultimate in overkill. Depleted uranium is both self sharpening and pyrophoric, meaning that when the round strikes armor it shatters but still remains sharp, and the shattered bits ignite (targets catch fire as described on p. 171, *SR5*). Oh, and if all the shattered bits of the round aren't removed from a surviving target, the target will develop cancer in a matter of weeks. There is a reason rounds of this type have been banned from use by international treaty and Corporate Court edict. Due to the difficulty and illegality of acquiring and working depleted uranium, the rounds are correspondingly rare and expensive. They are generally only produced in very small quantities for powerful firearms.

AMMUNITION

TYPE	THRESHOLD	DURATION
Regular firearms ammo	4	30 minutes
Special firearms ammo	6	30 minutes
Regular heavy weapon ammo	8	1 hour
Special heavy weapon ammo	10	1 hour

HI-DE ROUNDS

Hi-De, short for High Density rounds, are composed of densiplast and are undetectable by magnetic anomaly detectors (MADs). The propellant charge of these rounds is especially powerful to provide the densiplast bullet with the necessary punch to reach almost the same ballistic capabilities as regular ammunition. Any uncompensated recoil from firing Hi-De rounds is doubled. This is cumulative with the recoil multiplier of heavy weapons (see p. 175, *SR5*). Due to their lighter weight, the Damage Value from these rounds is reduced by 1 at long and extreme ranges.

HAND LOADS

In spite of the changes in the manufacturing of bullets over the last half century making the process more complex, there are still a few individuals who prefer to load their own ammo. Hand load ammo can be crafted to add a +1 Damage Value modifier or an additional -1 AP (but not both). Crafting this ammo requires an Armorer Extended Test to craft 10 rounds of ammunition with a Threshold and Duration as specified in the table below. This test requires a Hand Loading tool kit and crafting materials costing the standard value of the type of ammo being made plus ten percent.

SILVER BULLETS

Silver bullets replace a large portion of the mass of a standard bullet with silver intended to harm critters or other magical beings who are sensitive to the substance. Most of these rounds are bought by superstitious idiots who have watched too many trids about werewolves and don't realize that both loup garou and wolf shapeshifters are quite different than their fictional counterpart. When a silver bullet hits a being that is allergic to silver, the target suffers the effects described in the rules of the Allergy negative quality (p. 78, *SR5*). Since many beings inhabiting the Sixth World are allergic to certain substances, a wide range of projectiles with allergic substances and alloys are manufactured in small numbers, with silver bullets being the most well known. It is up to the gamemaster to determine the Availability, price, and other statistics for these kinds of ammunition.

SUBSONIC AMMO

Subsonic ammunition features a lighter charge and a slightly smaller bullet than regular rounds. This slows the bullet's muzzle velocity below the speed of sound, reducing the sound of the weapon being fired and making it easier to silence. Subsonic ammunition applies a -1 dice pool modifier on all Perception Tests to notice the weapon's use or locate the firing position. This dice pool modifier increases to -2 if a silencer or sound suppressor (p. 432, *SR5*) is used. Increase all penalties due to range by 1.

WOOD PULP ROUNDS

First developed by the Sylvestrian order, wood pulp rounds are a variety of capsule rounds designed specifically to fight vampires and other paracritters that are vulnerable to them due to wood allergies.

AMMUNITION, PER 10 SHOTS

TYPE	DV	AP	AVAIL	COST
Depleted uranium rounds	+1*	–5	28F	1,000¥
Hand loads	Special	Special	4R	+25%
Hi-De rounds	—	—	10F	150¥
Silver bullets	—	2	12R	250¥
Subsonic rounds	–1	—	8F	40¥
Wood pulp rounds	–4	4	6R	10¥

DRONES

AMMO DRONE

A small quadcopter drone with slot for six pistol-sized or smaller clips, four SMG or larger clips, or one drum of ammo. This drone is designed to follow you and drop ammo on command so you can sustain fire in a prolonged shootout. Comes with autosoft [Handling] Rating 2, which helps the drone navigate the battlefield.

AMMO DRONE (SMALL DRONE)

HAND	ACCEL	SPEED	PILOT	BOD	ARM	SENS	AVAIL	COST
2	2	2	3	2	4	2	5	3,000¥

RELOADING DRONE

A medium ground drone with manipulator arms and an ammo storage compartment, sometimes referred to as a gun caddie. The drone will take empty firearms

from you, reload them and hand them back to you, allowing you to continue firing. It can also hand you full ammo magazines, rockets, grenades, etc. as a Free Action, which you can then reload yourself. An Armorer autosoft suite is included with the drone, allowing it to reload all non-forbidden firearms. Forbidden firearms require an illegal Armorer autosoft costing 250 nuyen.

RELOADING DRONE (MEDIUM DRONE)

HAND	ACCEL	SPEED	PILOT	BOD	ARM	SENS	AVAIL	COST
4	2	3	3	3	4	2	6R	4,500¥

MITSUHAMA AKIYAMA

This bipedal anthroform drone is roughly the size and shape of a child, although the way it moves is decidedly inhuman. Designed as an assassin drone, it excels in stealth and maneuverability, having a ruthenium polymer coating and gecko grip pads on its hands and feet. This drone is almost always operated under the direct control of a rigger. The humanoid hands allow the use of standard weaponry, although firearms larger than submachine guns are too large for the drone's small frame. For the purposes of melee weapons, the drone is considered to have a Strength equal to its Body. The drone's arms each have Capacity 8 for installing cyberweapons. When using standard or cyberweapons, the rigger uses the relevant weapons skill instead of Gunnery and suffers from recoil penalties as a metahuman would. The drone's ruthenium polymer coating confers a -6 to Perception Tests to detect it when the coating is active. The drone's gecko grip pads confer a +4 to any Gymnastics Tests related to climbing.

MITSUHAMA AKIYAMA (MEDIUM DRONE)

HAND	ACCEL	SPEED	PILOT	BOD	ARM	SENS	AVAIL	COST
5	2	3	3	4	6	3	24F	200,000¥

SPARRING DRONE

This humanoid drone is specifically designed to act as a sparring partner for martial artists. It is specifically designed with padded armor and striking pads that make it immune from taking damage from melee unarmed attacks as well as preventing it from dealing Physical damage itself. This drone can be loaded with tutorsofts (p. 442, *SR5*) to help teach Close Combat skills and specific Martial Arts. The drone comes with Rating 1 Blades, Clubs, and Unarmed Combat tutorsofts pre-installed. Upgrades can be bought for the standard price.

SPARRING DRONE (LARGE DRONE)

HAND	ACCEL	SPEED	PILOT	BOD	ARM	SENS	AVAIL	COST
3	2	2	3	4	2 (Special)	3	6	5,000¥

ADEPT POWERS

ADEPT SPELL

COST: 1.0 PP

The adept has learned to cast a single spell like a mage. You learn one spell for free when acquiring this power. The maximum Force of the spell is your Magic Rating, and the Drain is always physical, resisted with Body + Willpower. This ability otherwise follows the standard rules for spellcasting. The adept can take ranks in the Spellcasting skill and is required to take at least one rank to use this power. This power can only be taken once.

ADEPT ACCIDENT

COST: 0.5 PP

This power allows an adept to disrupt the mana flows within a target they have touched. Activating this power is a Simple Action and can be activated any time within (Magic) minutes from the time the target is touched (meaning the adept must have succeeded in a touch attack. The adept rolls Magic + Willpower [Astral] vs. Reaction + Intuition [Physical]. If the adept wins, the target suffers a glitch or accident as determined by the gamemaster. If the adept scores 4 or more net hits, it is considered a critical glitch with potentially catastrophic results. The adept must resist Drain (Body + Willpower) equal to the number of hits (not net hits).

FOCUSED ARCHERY

COST: 0.25 PP PER LEVEL (MAX 3)

This ability allows an adept to focus their qi and draw a bow that they normally would not be strong enough to use. Solely for the purposes of determining the maximum Rating of bow they are able to fire without penalty, an adept can treat their Strength as 1 higher for each level they have in this power. If an adept using this power fires a bow more than once in a Combat Turn, they must resist Drain equal to twice the number of levels they have in this power at the beginning of the next Combat Turn.

KIAI

COST: 0.25PP PER LEVEL (MAX 6)

The adept summons up their qi to let out a terrifying battle cry that can send their foes fleeing. This power affects everyone who hears it, whether friend or foe, within a radius of (Magic) meters. The adept makes an Opposed Test using its Magic + Kiai Rating against the target's Logic + Willpower. Any bonuses against fear, such as the Guts quality, are added to the target's Opposed Test. If the target wins,

they suffer no ill effects. If the adept wins, the victim takes a -2 penalty to all actions for a number of Combat Turns equal to the net hits. If the adept's net hits exceed the target's Willpower, the victim flees in terror until they are safely away and out of sight of the adept. Even once the fear fades, the target must succeed in a Willpower + Logic (adept's net hits) Test to gather the nerve to face the adept again. At the end of the Combat Turn, the adept takes Drain equal to the level of this power. They may attempt to soak the drain with Body + Willpower.

MASTER ARCHER

COST: 1.0 PP

An adept with this ability has no equal when wielding a bow. Any Action Phase in which the adept uses the Fire Bow Simple Action or the Load and Fire Bow complex action, they can ignore 2 points of negative dice pool modifiers due to their own movement. In addition, any ranged attacks the adept makes with a bow gains +1 die.

PRECISION THROWING

COST: 0.25PP PER LEVEL (MAX 3 LEVELS)

Adepts with this power go far beyond the limit of their physical form when it comes to getting their thrown weapons to strike their targets. For the purposes of determining Range only, treat the adept as having 2 additional Strength per level of this power.

POSITIVE QUALITIES

BARRENS RAT

(COST: 5 KARMA)

Growing up on the streets, you learned quickly that to keep what little you had, you better get good at concealing the things you are carrying and that one of those things better be a weapon. Any objects you attempt to hide on yourself receive -1 to their Concealability modifier. A number of items up to half your Agility (rounded up) can gain this bonus.

ELEMENTAL FOCUS

(COST: 10 KARMA)

Your magic manifests more easily with one element than the rest. Choose an elemental type when taking this quality. When casting spells of that type, you get a +2 dice pool modifier. Drain you may take from casting spells of that type is of the same type. You also suffer the secondary effects of that type.

POISONER

(COST: 5 KARMA)

Your experience with using poison has taught you a few tricks to make it more effective. Increase the Power of any Toxins you use by 1.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

(COST: 2 KARMA)

Constantly striving to perfect a certain ability has paid off. Increase your limit by 1 in a single non-combat skill.

NEGATIVE QUALITIES

CODE OF HONOR: AVENGING ANGEL

(BONUS: 8 KARMA)

You only accept contracts to kill those who you believe deserve death. You will not intentionally kill any person who you believe does not deserve it. If you accidentally kill someone who does not deserve it, you suffer a -1 dice pool modifier to all Mental tests for twenty-four hours, and you lose 1 Karma. Establish with your gamemaster what your character would consider "deserving of death" (see p. 79, *SR5*) for guidelines.

FACELESS

(BONUS: 6 KARMA)

You have worn disguises so frequently and for so long that being out in public wearing your real face makes you feel vulnerable. You suffer a -2 dice pool modifier on Social tests unless your face is disguised or otherwise concealed. It does not matter if this disguise is magical or mundane, just that you are unrecognizable. People you know and trust such as close friends, family, or teammates do not require a disguise to avoid the penalty.

IMPASSIVE

(BONUS: 7 KARMA)

Nobody can see as much death as you have and not have it affect them. Some would have gone mad, but you simply grew cold. Your Limit for all social skills except Intimidation decreases by 1.

SPELLS

CATCH

(MANIPULATION)

Type: P **Range:** LOS
Duration: I **DV:** F - 2

This is something like Fling, but in the other direction. This spell allows you to quickly yank one individual unattended object (up to Force in kilos) into your hand. The maximum range is your Magic in meters. It is exceptionally useful for retrieving a dropped gun or a thrown weapon. Or winning the egg toss.

CONCEAL SCENT

(OBJECT) (MANIPULATION)

Type: P **Range:** Touch
Duration: S **DV:** F - 3

This spell removes scent traces from an object and is a favorite of smugglers looking to fool man's best friend or individuals trying to slip explosives past security checkpoints. Any scent-based Perception Tests take a dice pool penalty equal to the hits scored on this spell.

SNAKEBLOOD

(MANIPULATION)

Type: P **Range:** Touch
Duration: S **DV:** F - 2

This spell coats your body with a bubble of cool air, concealing your body heat from detection by thermographic vision or sensors. Heat-based Perception Tests suffer a negative dice pool modifier equal to the hits scored on this spell.

RECHARGE POTENCY

(MANIPULATION)

Type: M **Range:** Touch
Duration: P **DV:** F + 1

This spell allows a mage to recharge an alchemical preparation whose Potency is waning. Make a Spellcasting + Magic [Force] opposed by the Force at which the alchemical preparation was created. Each net hit is restores a point of Potency to the preparation, up to the original Potency - 1. This spell cannot be cast on any preparation more than once.

SPELLBLADES

MANABLADE

Type: M **Range:** Special
Duration: S **DV:** F - 2

POWERBLADE

Type: P **Range:** Special
Duration: S **DV:** F - 2

Spellblades are a product of a failed line of research by MCT. Attempts to create a sustained damaging connection of energy failed to yield the desired results, but they resulted in a maintained extension of a spell, based on the formulas for Manabolt and Powerbolt. These spells could yield a field of energy roughly the same space as a sword, maintained for as long as the caster could concentrate. The formula was altered to allow the caster to "hold" onto the spell at a point analogous to a grip, though the "blade" portion of the spell remained dangerous. It was found that these blades could parry one another and could cause repeated damage, strike after strike. As this did not meet the requirements for the project, it was abandoned, and the formulas sold through backchannels to recoup losses. One formula fell into the hands of wizgangs, where they quickly gained popularity for their showiness and the skill needed to maintain and wield one. Duels and motorcycle jousts with blazing energy have become the new fad among these Awakened youths. Shadowrunners and assassins with a talent for swordplay may appreciate the blades for their additional damage potential, as well as the ability to summon a blade anywhere without trying to smuggle it into a secure location. A Powerblade operates on the same principle as a Powerbolt or Powerball, affecting physical objects, capable of parrying and resisted by armor. A Manablade works like a Manabolt or Manaball, bypassing armor and capable of affecting spirits, but unable to parry physical attacks or damage objects. Note that weapon foci are able to parry Spellblades of either type due to their magically active nature. Spellblades can only be used by the person who casts them; they cannot be cast for anyone else to use. The range of the spell, then, is limited to the caster, though the spell can affect anything it touches once cast.

The damage for the weapons created by this spell equals to the Force plus the net hits rolled on the melee weapon skill of the wielder's choice. (In spite of the name, the Clubs or Blades skill works equally well). The Accuracy of the Spellblade is equal to the Force of the spell, and the Reach is 1.

THE WAYS AND THE MEANS

The Sixth World has seen the return of a lot of old traditions, and the art of the poisoner is among them. With the Awakening came a flood of new species of plants and animals, many of them toxic, venomous, poisonous, or deadly in strange new ways. That meant poisoners could kill their victims and the authorities could not even identify the poison, let alone track down the source.

The toxins detailed here follow all of the rules for toxins given on p. 408, *SR5*.

ACONITE

Also known as wolfsbane, monkshood, or leopard's bane, aconite is a poison derived from a common plant with blue flowers that resembles the hood of a monk. The poison is an alkaloid that paralyzes the nervous system and slows the heartbeat, possibly causing cardiac arrest. It was recently discovered that aconite can force creatures who have changed their form through magic back into their native form. This is presumed to be the origin of the legend of wolfsbane being effective against werewolves. Any metahuman or critter not in their natural form must make a Willpower + Magic (Power of the toxin after the Toxin Resistance Test) Test or revert to their natural form forcibly.

ATROPINE

Distilled from the plant known as deadly nightshade or belladonna, it contains a poisonous alkaloid similar to aconite. The plant can be recognized by its purple tu-

bular flowers and black berries. While most poisoners use the concentrated form, the berries are sometimes slipped into pies and pastries. The poison's effects include dry mouth, dilated pupils, a rapid heartbeat, hallucinations, confusion, and possibly seizures.

EKYELEBENIE VENOM

The Awakened green mamba, native to sub-Saharan Africa spits this venom at its prey, blinding them. The victim of this toxin takes Physical damage and a visual Perception penalty equal to the Power of the toxin after the Toxin Resistance Test. If the vision penalty is between -1 and -5 (including those values), the duration is 10 minutes. If the vision penalty is -6 or higher, the victim is blinded for twenty-four hours.

NOVA SCORPION VENOM

This slow-acting and deadly venom is the primary means the Nova Scorpion uses to kill its prey. They prefer to strike and then withdraw, returning to claim their prey later. Many assassins follow their lead. Though powerful, the anti-venin for this toxin is relatively common.

DOG ASP VENOM

The venom of the Dog Asp is a powerful cytotoxin causing cellular necrosis. If you get hit by this, you better hope it is somewhere you can get replaced with cyberware, because if it's flesh, it's dying and will need to be removed.

NAGA VENOM

This toxin is milked from the large metasapient snakes found across Amazonia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Much in the same way that poor college students often sell their blood (or other body parts), some naga sell their venom as a less-than-legal means of acquiring the nuyen to better explore metahuman society. While the venom is not itself magical, the potency of a naga's venom is determined by their magical potency (Toxin Power equals the naga's Magic), so some gifted individuals are able to charge a premium price.

DIMETHYL SULFOXIDE (DMSO)

DMSO (P. 188, *Stolen Souls*) is the greatest tool in the poisoner's arsenal that modern medical science has yet to provide. Most people don't realize that many everyday common substances can be lethal in sufficient dosage. DMSO makes it easy to push that dosage from normal to deadly. A prominent heiress was assassinated recently by adding DMSO to her bath water. The coroner's report listed her cause of death as dilutional hyponatremia, also known as water poisoning. Be wary of buying this from suppliers you don't know well. Besides being useful to assassins, it is highly sought after by drug dealers to make their product into easily usable patches. This has placed DMSO high on the list of items that are sold by undercover cops conducting sting operations.

TETRODOTOXIN

Once extracted from the deadly (but delicious) fugu or blowfish, tetrodotoxin is a potent neurotoxin, which is now produced through bacterial synthesis. This toxin prevents the signals for muscle contractions from firing, causing paralysis. Symptoms include numbness, a rapid irregular heartbeat, and paralysis of the diaphragm, cessation of breath. If the Power of an attack after the Toxin Resistance Test exceeds the target's Reaction, the target is paralyzed and unable to take physical actions for 1 hour; however if the Power of an attack after the Toxin Resistance Test exceeds the target's reaction by more than 3, they lose the ability to breathe and begin Suffocating (p. 137, *SR5*). Even if the target is not paralyzed, they suffer a -2 dice pool modifier for the next hour. Sugammadex is an effective counter-agent

TOXIN STATS

TYPE	VECTOR	SPEED	PENETRATION	POWER	EFFECT
Aconite	Injection, Ingestion	1 Combat Turn	0	5	Physical Damage, Nausea, Special
Atropine	Injection	Immediate	0	5	Physical Damage, Disorientation
Dog asp venom	Injection	1 minute	0	10	Physical Damage
Ekyelebenie venom	Contact	1 Combat Turn	0	8	Physical Damage, Blindness (Special)
Naga venom	Injection	Immediate	0	Special	Physical Damage
Nova scorpion venom	Injection	1 hour	-2	12	Physical Damage
Tetrodotoxin	Injection, Ingestion	10 minutes with Ingestion, otherwise 1 Combat Turn.	0	7	Physical Damage, Paralysis (Special)

TOXIN AVAILABILITY & COST

TYPE	AVAIL	COST PER DOSE
Aconite	11F	200¥
Atropine	10F	150¥
Dog asp venom	12F	350¥
Ekyelebenie venom	16F	575¥
Naga venom	Power x 3F	Power x 100¥
Nova scorpion venom	14F	600¥
Tetrodotoxin	18F	1,000¥

against tetrodotoxin although there is only sufficient time to administer it of the toxin is ingested.

ALCHEMY

Alchemy is a powerful tool in the hands of a skilled assassin. You can be at home cracking open a cold beer at the same time your mark kicks it. The use of this method takes great care, though, because it can be very easy to miss your target and kill a bystander. If you leave a pillow enchanted with One Less Human in a mark's hotel room, you better hope the maid is an ork and his mistress is an elf. Because of this, many successful alchemical assassins are often masters of infiltration, sleight of hand and social engineering. Like all hits, intercepting the target is the moment of truth, but an alchemist need not intercept the target personally. They just need the target to encounter their preparation. This is often achieved by getting ahead of the mark and essentially booby-trapping their hotel, car, or any other place you can reliably predict they will be.

Preparations of touch spells are preferred for their lower Drain, but certain contracts may require the kind of message only a Fireball can send. One Less and Death Touch are also popular among alchemical killers, particularly those that use enchanted arrows. Turn to Goo can be a nasty trick in the right place, particularly on a bar of soap in the mark's shower. Enchant the mark's gas cap with an Ignite spell with a timed trigger for when they are driving to work. All evidence is destroyed, and it looks like a mechanical failure. An Enabler spell enchanting a syringe can make a toxin hit that much harder.

Alchemist Initiates have even more options when plying their craft. Besides Masking, which is practically necessary for any spellslinger in this business, Anchoring is a favorite of alchemists. It affords them a much looser timetable and much more precise tools for affecting their chosen target. With a good assensing of the target or a material sample, a preparation can be crafted that will affect the target and only the target (see p. 219, *Street Grimoire*). In the eyes of some, this is the only thing that separates these type of hitters from terrorists who send mail bombs.

PROJECTILES AND ALCHEMY

There are no magic bullets, in a metaphorical sense as well as a literal sense. Since the days of black powder, gun barrels have had rifling that dramatically improves the range and accuracy of projectiles. The downside of this for the alchemist is that any bullet used as a lynchpin will be sufficiently marred while leaving the barrel to destroy any enchantments on that bullet. I have heard plenty of rumors of alchemists buying up old black-powder muskets and blunderbusses produced without rifled barrels, but I hear few rumors of their success. The mere process of firing a bullet from a gun, even one without rifling, is damaging to a bullet. Some very limited success has been found going back even further by eschewing bullets for simple balls. Special musket balls are used—they're made of steel instead of lead, and deep engraving is usually used to set the enchantment. While these balls have about an even chance of retaining an enchantment after being fired, they suffer from such wild inaccuracy and poor range that you might as well just walk up to the target and throw the ball at them. Looking at the silver lining, if you do somehow manage to hit, those musket balls are absurdly huge by standard caliber measurements, so they pack quite a wallop.

Some alchemists have taken to enchanting empty cartridges and loading them into their gun. There are a few advantages to this. For one, it is more comfortable to some. It also makes it more obvious that someone is a threat. Holding out some strange-looking doodad could mean you are a crazy bum or that it is time to geek the mage. Everybody understands what a gun means, though (even if they don't know it is going to shoot a Manabolt instead of a bullet). Revolvers are particularly popular among this crown because they can load a couple bullets, a couple spells, and use an ammo skip mod to instantly select from whichever they want to fire. It should be noted that the spells aren't fired by the gun's hammer coming down but by a mental command trigger.

Some advanced alchemists have taken to filling capsule rounds with liquid alchemical preparations. These work great, but ultimately it is just a work-around for their specialization and lack of skill in raw spellcasting.

Archery is by far the most popular medium for alchemical projectiles. It is fairly common for talismongers to sell bows and crossbows that are also alchemical foci. Ostensibly this is for avid paracritter hunters, but I think we all know better. While not as long range, as powerful, or as rapid-firing as guns, bows are silent and extremely powerful in the hands of an alchemist. If an arrow fails to pierce a mark's armor, the spell will still trigger on their aura if it is a contact trigger preparation or can be triggered with a command word.

ADEPT

Adepts definitely have an edge on stealth when it comes to making hits. They often don't need weapons

because they *are* weapons. They can slip through security without setting off MAD scanners and pass any pat-down because they are truly unarmed. Passive adept powers wont trip FAB sensors and aren't detectable with a cursory glance in the astral. Direct Assensing can pick up that an adept is Awakened but that is assuming the adept doesn't have Masking and will not tell the type of magic they possess in any case.

Speaking of FAB sensors: Yes, that's a thing! They aren't common because fluorescing astral bacteria is finicky to keep alive and a bit costly for common purposes. Still, if magical security is a concern and a mage at every checkpoint is too costly, they're sometimes used. It is basically just a sealed vial of the bacteria with an electrical photosensor. If the bacteria fluoresces due to active magic, the photosensor sends a signal to the operator. Then security usually calls over a mage to Assense the individual. Some FAB sensors are also incorporated into hand-held security wands along with MAD and cyberware scanners.

But back to the fun of getting through security. Once you've made it, usually with the help of a very expensive fake ID, an adept can have many abilities that allow them to get the job done. Some can kill with a punch, some can steal a gun from a security guard without them realizing, and some can throw a teaspoon with the force and accuracy to eliminate a target. The trick is making an escape when you kill so close, but being able to jump out a third-story window and land at a run certainly helps. The wide variety of capabilities adepts can command can prove extremely difficult for a security detail to account for, so they are not to be underestimated.

MAGICAL ASSASSINATION TACTICS

When it comes to killing someone, a bullet to the brain or a knife in the back usually does the job just fine. When someone hires a mage to do the job, they usually either want to send a message or they want it to look like an accident.

Sending a message usually means big, messy, and in public. There is usually a high risk of getting caught and a correspondingly high pay rate. The messiness of a public hit can work in your favor as the group terror can make a substantial background count to help cover your astral traces. That being said, a public hit on a mark who is expecting it can be unbelievably dangerous. Direct magical defenses are often fairly minimal, just there to defend against the suicidal nuts. Most of the focus is making sure that it is glaringly obvious that anyone who tries anything is not getting away. After all, a spirit can overtake you through the astral in a fraction of a second, manifest, and end any chance of escape.

Making a hit look like an accident is by far the most common job for a mage assassin. It can be particularly hard building a rep for this sort of thing for obvious reasons, but there are still some well-known operators out there. I have heard of some absolutely elegant tricks pulled over the years. Here's a sample:

FAB SENSOR

This sensor function can be added to any sensor package. This sensor can only determine the presence or absence of active mana sources in the immediate area, not the exact source or strength. Background count temporarily reduces the effective Rating by an equivalent amount. The bacteria sealed within the sensor require special sterile feedstock to maintain at a cost of 50 nuyen per month.

MAX RANGE	CAPACITY	AVAILABILITY	COST
5 meters	[1]	+8R	4,000¥

Cast Petrify on someone while they are near water. They fall unconscious and turn to stone. If they fall into the water (or you help them "fall" into the water), they will sink to the bottom. When you stop sustaining the spell they will quickly drown. There will be no marks on the body indicating foul play, and by the time they find the body (if they ever do), your astral signature will have faded. Another good trick is to put the mark in a lethal situation, like casting Intoxication or Confusion on them while they are driving. Sometimes you can even completely shift the blame to another party, for example casting a Physical Mask on the mark so they look like a Halloweener while walking around on Ancients turf.

Sometimes making it look like an accident simply means making someone disappear permanently. Kill them however is convenient, then make the body go poof. Cast Turn to Goo and wash your problems down the drain. An earth spirit or a Shape Earth spell can be used to bury bodies without leaving a trace of the soil being disturbed.

ASSASSINATION KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

Becoming a successful hitter isn't all guns and stealth. You have to use your head or before you blink it will be on the chopping block. Here are some useful Knowledge Skills assassins may select, with particularly applicable specializations.

COMBAT TACTICS (AMBUSH)

Assassination is not about a fair fight. It is about striking first and striking as hard as possible. If a mark gets a chance to defend themselves, things have already gone wrong. Use this skill to find the right place to stage and ambush and then use it properly.

FORENSICS (CLEANING)

The best way not to get caught is to be one step ahead of those chasing you. Knowing a few forensic techniques helps you better erase the traces you leave behind.

SECURITY DESIGN (VIP)

Guarding a person is very different than guarding an object or place. By necessity, there are weak points in the security that are necessary to allow the target to go about their daily life.

SECURITY TACTICS (VIP)

High-profile targets will quite often have a security detail. If you can predict how they will respond to a threat, you can exploit their predictability.

SHADOW COMMUNITY (SAFEHOUSES)

Once the job is done, the first instinct of many is to skip town. This action is predictable and many an assassin has been caught trying to board a flight. It is often best to find a safe place to lay low.

SYNDICATES (PERSONALITIES)

It pays to know the big names in crime syndicates. They are quite often your employers and your targets.

UNDERWORLD (WETWORK)

These are the basics. Know your business. Amateurs don't last long in this game.

ASSASSIN CONTACTS

Knowing who is hiring, who is doing the work, and who is willing to help for the right price are all essential. While the popular image of assassins has them acting as a lone wolf, every successful hit has a handful of people that made success possible, whether they know it or not.

ARMORER

You need someone to trick out all your weapons just the way you like, right? Use Arms Dealer (p. 182, *Run Faster*); reduce Negotiations 5 to Negotiations 3, add Industrial Mechanics 2.

CLEANER

A few jobs require leaving a corpse as a message, but in most cases making a body disappear is preferable if only to keep your anonymity. Use Recicladore (p. 191, *Run Faster*).

ID MANUFACTURER

Completing a job may only take one bullet, but several false identities (stats on p. 187, *Run Faster*).

INFOBROKER

What is your target's current location? What are their habits and vices? Going into a job blind is the fastest way to end up dead. Use News Reporter (p. 190, *Run Faster*), reduce Sneaking 4 to Sneaking 2 and Tracking 3 to Tracking 1, add Con 2 and Negotiation 2.

MERCENARY ALCHEMIST

Most alchemists are pretty careful about who they hand off their preparations to since their spell aura can be tracked back to them. Some alchemists are willing to be less discerning for a hefty price. For an otherwise mundane operative, having a few magical tricks up your sleeve can make a huge difference. Use Talismonger (p. 194, *Run Faster*); change Arcana 4 to Arcana 3, Negotiation 4 to Negotiation 3, and add Enchanting 2.

PARABOTANIST

Many toxic plant specimens are rare and temperamental to keep. The extraction of toxins from these specimens is best left to the experts. Use Talismonger (p. 194, *Run Faster*); change Alchemy 4 to Alchemy 2, add Survival 2, change Magical Threats 5 to Magical Threats 4, Magic Theory 5 to Magic Theory 4, and Parabotany 2 to Parabotany 5.

PARABIOLOGIST

Acquiring, keeping, and milking an Ekelybenie just for one dose of venom is a lot of risk and effort. Let someone else do it. Use Parabotanist as decribed above, but change Parabotany 5 to Parabiology 5.

SMUGGLER

It is all well and good to have the best gear and weapons possible, but if you can't get them into the same country as your target they are worthless. Use Smuggler archetype (p. 125, *SR5*).

EXPANDED WEAPON CONCEALMENT RULES

These additional rules are intended to be guidelines only, to be used or not at gamemaster discretion. They expand on the rules on pp. 419-420 of *SR5*.

There are only so many places on the body where you can conceal a weapon without it being noticeable. Any object with a negative Concealability modifier of -1 or less can be concealed on the arms of legs, while any-

thing with 0 or greater Concealability modifiers must be hidden around the torso.

When concealing weapons, it is not only the size of the weapon that matters, but also the number. Obviously the more you are trying to hide the more difficult it is. Positive Concealability modifiers could be added if an individual was concealing more than two Heavy Pistol-sized items, more than four Light Pistol-sized items, or more than eight hold out pistol sized items.

It may be appropriate to grant trolls and other large bodied characters a -1 Concealability modifier, while dwarves and other small bodied characters get a +1 Concealability modifier due to their relative body size. Keep in mind that weapons and tools customized to each metatype should not have such a bonus apply, as they are sized proportionately.

EXPANDED BOW RULES

While they share the same physical statistics, bows come in two main varieties: traditional and compound.

A traditional bow offers the unique action Overdraw. As a Free Action, a player can use Overdraw on a traditional bow, which causes it to deal damage as if it were one point of Rating higher (to a maximum of 10) than it actually is. On a critical glitch during an Overdraw action, the bow breaks irreparably. When using a Take Aim action with a traditional-style bow, an archer can hold the bow at the ready for a number of Combat Turns equal to their Body before the fatigue of holding the drawn bow ruins their aim, and they lose the Take Aim bonus. A traditional bow cannot mount a smartlink, as the variable nature of the draw makes predicting projectile velocity impossible. A traditional style bow can be designed to be collapsible, requiring a Complex Action to assemble. Cost for this modification is an additional 50 nuyen per point of Rating.

A compound bow cannot use the Overdraw action due to the nature of the pulley system it uses. The benefit of a compound bow is that the pulley system makes it extremely easy to hold the bow drawn, allowing an archer to maintain a Take Aim action for (Body x 4) Combat Turns. A compound bow can also mount a smartlink, as the pulley system gives the projectiles a fixed velocity.

With any bow or crossbow, a laser sight is ineffective at any range beyond Short due to parabolic nature of the projectiles. Unless you somehow get a laser that also travels in a parabola. Which you can't.

NEW ARCHETYPE

MYSTIC ARCHER

From the moment the first black powder musket was fired to the latest chrome steel hand cannon rolling off the assembly line, most would say guns rule the world. To him, the old ways still have their place and the bow and arrow still means silent death as it did for thousands of years. He is a skilled hunter, seeking the kind of quarry only the Awakened world can bring. He stalks it with spell and arrow, fused into a deadly tool for taking down his prey, whether it walks on four legs or two.

METATYPE: ORK

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	6 (8)	2 (3)	7	5	2	4	2	2	6.0	6

Condition Modifier	1/11
Armor	10
Limits	Physical 7(8), Mental 5, Social 5
Physical Initiative	6(7) + 2D6
Active Skills	Alchemy 5 (Combat +2), Archery 4 (Bow +2), Assensing 2, Counterspelling 2, Disenchanting 2, Gymnastics 2 (Climbing +2), Palming 2, Perception 3, Sneaking 2, Summoning 5, Survival 1, Unarmed Combat 2
Knowledge Skills	Awakened Culture 2, Combat Tactics 2 (Ambush +2), Parazoology 2 (North America +2), Urban Legends 2
Language Skills	English N, Or'zet 2
Qualities	Gremlins (2), Hawk Eye, Perceptive (2)
Adept Powers	Astral Perception (Qi Focus), Enhanced Accuracy (Archery) (0.25 PP), Focused Archery (1, 0.25 PP), Improved Ability (Archery) (2, 1.0 PP), Improved Physical Attribute (Agility) (2, 2.0 PP), Improved Reflexes (1, 1.5 PP), Master Archer (1.0 PP)
Alchemical Preparations	Death Touch, Enhanced Aim, Heal, Knockout, Physical Camouflage
Gear	Alchemy focus (Force 2), certified credstick (standard), fake SIN (Rating 2), fake hunting license (Rating 2), forearm guards, gecko tape gloves, Low lifestyle (3 months) w/ special work area (Alchemy), Meta Link commlink (2), qi focus (Rating 4), reagents (12 drams), Urban Explorer jumpsuit [w/ thermal damping (Rating 4)]
Weapons	Bow (Traditional, Rating 8) [Bow, Acc 7, DV 10(11), AP –2, w/ 10 Ares Monotip arrows (Rating 8), 4 Hammerhead arrows (Rating 8), and 2 Explosive head arrows (Rating 8)] Knucks (treated with Knockout preparation) [Unarmed Combat, Acc [Physical], Reach —, DV 8P, AP —]
Contacts	Ork Underground elder (Connection 3, Loyalty 2), Talismonger (connection 2, loyalty 1)
Starting Nuyen	2D6 x 40¥

GAME INFORMATION

WETWORK AND TEAMWORK

While assassins tend to be solitary people, shadowrunners are not, both because good shadowrunning requires a balance of skills and because having only one player in a role-playing game tends to be somewhat less fun. So when introducing wetwork into a *Shadowrun* game, be sure to keep emphasizing the team aspect of the game.

The first consideration in the team aspect of wetwork is making sure this is an angle everyone in your group is comfortable with. Yes, some groups are full of PCs who are stone-cold killers, the type of people who would take a contract on their own mother if the pay was right, but there are other players who try to work from some kind of code of decency or even morality (though the definition of those terms in the Sixth World tends to be pretty slippery). Work out with players what kind of missions they are comfortable accepting, and don't railroad them into missions that are going to make the game less fun for them. Remember that the information in this book can be used in two ways—either as information players need as they undertake wetwork missions of their own, or information they will need to interfere with the assassination attempts of others. They have the flexibility of being bringers of death or guardian angels—whatever helps them have fun. Remember to consult the **Group Rules and Boundaries** section of *SR5* (p. 333) for advice on how to work with players to find out what plot elements can be involved while keeping things fun for everyone.

Whether the players decide to accept wetwork missions or if they prefer defending people against assassination attempts, remember to keep up the teamwork and don't let the mission become a lone assassin plotting a job, or a one-on-one cat-and-mouse game between assassin and quarry. If anything, wetwork missions require more teamwork than regular jobs, because the preparations are so painstaking. This generally should not be a case where the build up for the players leads to some grand fight scene or rolling gun battle. If they are doing wetwork in the way that most Mr. Johnsons prefer, their preparations should take the great majority of the time, and the act, when it occurs, should be swift, precise, and hidden from the view of pretty much everyone but the victim.

Giving every team member an individual chance to shine during the legwork section can be good (the decker needs to crack the security system of the location where the hit will go down, the face needs to work over contacts of the target to find out certain habits and tendencies, etc.), but that can make the game feel like one player at a time has something interesting to do while the others are sitting around waiting. Instead of that approach, consider some of the following elements that can bring the skills of multiple PCs into play at the same time:

The hard-to-reach informant: It may be that there is a certain contact the group's face needs to work over in order to obtain critical information, but that contact is not just sitting at home waiting for the runners to drop by. Maybe they're in prison; maybe they're in a remote, rural location surrounded by alert guards. Whatever the case may be, getting the face in will require the combined skills of the hackers, Awakened, covert, and combat members of the group so that the face can work their brand of magic.

The cover story: The team may want to build an excuse for them to be in a particular area, monitoring their target. They could be a new gang moving into disputed territory, a new business opening up in a vacant storefront, or a new neighbor in a corporate subdivision. Whatever the case, the team will need to use a combination of skills to successfully make themselves appear as they want to be seen.

The rival team: A big enough target may bring more than one assassin to the dance. The team may need to get creative to figure out how to lead the rival team(s) off the scent—or go brute force and just take them out and leave them where no one will find them.

The incomplete dossier: Everyone knows that Mr. Johnson is going to withhold some information—there's always some stuff that comes on a need-to-know basis. But what if some of that unrevealed information significantly changes the shape of the job? What if someone the runners had been told was developing a killer virus

was actually close to a cure for the latest strain of VITAS? What if the embezzler stealing corporate funds was using that cash to support a free clinic in the Barrens? Giving them information that changes the nature of the mission can test all members of the team to figure out how they will adjust and what they want the end of the mission to be—or if they're going to just forget what they learn, finish the job, and collect the cash.

The complication: Sure, it would be nice if the job went off exactly as planned, without a hitch. It would also be nice if Richard Villiers accidentally transferred a billion nuyen to your bank account. Neither event is likely to happen. A complication in the legwork can put every member on their toes and keep them busy. Maybe they noticed some physical or astral surveillance they hadn't seen before. Maybe a neighborhood kid gets too nosy and sees some stuff that's supposed to stay hidden. Maybe a local organized crime outfit gets wind of what's going down and decides to make a show of strength, to make it clear that nothing should happen on their turf without their authorization. Maybe the mark hired assassins of their own to hit any active assassins in the area, just to be safe. Any of these complications can give every member of the team something to do.

LIFE MODULES

The following Life Modules are for use with the Life Module character creation system (p. 65, *Run Faster*) and reflect the experiences characters might have accumulated if they had spent part of their life in the assassination trade—or training for that sort of a life. Note that some existing modules, such as the Fugitive and Street Urchin modules in the Formative Years category, or Gang Warfare in the Teen Years category, can be appropriate for someone who ends up in the assassination trade.

REAL LIFE

ASSASSINS'S APPRENTICE

You weren't the person who pulled the trigger; you were the person who helped make sure that the trig-

ger could be pulled, and when it was, that the intended target would fall. You didn't get blood on your hands, at least not technically, but you saw the world, learned about a lot of dark corners and back alleys, and had a front-row seat to a lot of people dying. You also made a decent living, enough to pay you to take some time to think about how much of a soul you have left, and whether you cared to do anything with it.

Attributes: Intuition +1, Reaction +1
Qualities: Blandness
Skills: Armorer +1, Con+1, Etiquette +1, Demolitions +1, Disguise +1, Forgery +1, Gunnery +1, Gymnastics +1, Negotiation +1, Palming +1, Perception +1, Sneaking +1, Professional Knowledge: Retail Operations, Street Knowledge: Sniper Nests +2, +5 language points of the player's choice (must be divided between at least two languages)

GUARDIAN ANGEL

At some point in your life, you decided you had seen enough killing, and you wanted to stop it. You took it upon yourself to look after the people you selected to protect—perhaps people in a specific community, or maybe a specific profession or some other category—and you dedicated years of your life to ferreting out threats against these people and making sure any attempted kills never went through.

Attributes: Reaction +1, Willpower +1
Qualities: Guts
Skills: Clubs +1, First Aid +1, Gymnastics +2, Intimidation +1, Medicine +1, Perception +1, Pistols +1, Running +1, Sneaking +1, Tracking +1, Professional Knowledge: Small Group Tactics +1, Street Knowledge: Assassin Networks +1, Street Knowledge: Runner Hangouts +1, Street Knowledge: Weapons Manufacturers +1

RITUAL KILLER

Having shown some skill at ritual magic in you early years, you were brought into a secretive group well versed in using magic to strike at people thought to be unreachable. As a result, you gained some fearsome skills with ritual spellcasting.

Attributes: Willpower +2
Skills: Arcana +1, Counterspelling +1, Perception +1, Ritual Spellcasting +3, Sneaking +1, Spellcasting +1, Survival +1, Tracking +2, Professional Knowledge: Security Techniques +1, Street Knowledge: Material Links +2
Rituals: Curse, Prodigal Spell

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Looking for some wetwork plots to work into your campaign? Look no further.

BREAKING BRACKHAVEN

Several people, including some very powerful ones, have determined that Kenneth Brackhaven has come to the end of his usefulness as governor of Seattle. Killing him, though, will not be the most effective way to end his reign, as it will make him a martyr, increasing the likelihood that a Brackhaven ally will inherit the post, continuing the policies and practices that let to people becoming disenchanted with Brackhaven in the first place. So instead of having Brackhaven dead, the people behind this job want him demoralized, and that means taking out some key allies. They want three people dead, using three different methods to put Brackhaven off-balance. The proposed victims are as follows: Chief of Staff Corrine Dakin (must appear natural); Seattle Commissioner of Race Relations Jassila Feddersen (should appear to be an accident); Brackhaven Investments United Corporate Council Representative William Roger (should look like a bloody murder).

CONNECT THE DOTS

Three recent assassinations have unsettled the UCAS capital of DeeCee: Representative Thomas Lincoln, IRS Deputy Commissioner Shirrelle Thomas, and DeeCee Police Third District Commander Calvin Burris. Mr. Johnson believes the assassinations are connected, and he wants to find out if they really are, and if so, how.

Mr. Johnson is correct—they are connected. Tracing the path of who is responsible leads to the Black Lodge. Lincoln was a member thought to have betrayed the organization, Thomas had been investigating some tax dodging as of a large DeeCee nonprofit organization that is actually a Lodge front, and Burris was tracking talisleggers in his area who, unbeknownst to him, had Lodge connections.

So the Lodge is cracking down. The question is, why here? Why now? And who's next?

CUTTING THE PSYCHE

For this job, Ms. Johnson does not bother much with the traditional fake name. Her real name is Vina Patel, and she wants the players to look into the death of her brother. She says he was lost a year ago, then died last month.

To explain what she means, she says that her brother Ajay had his mind invaded last year as cognitive fragmentation disorder was erupting across the world. The conquest of the personality fragment was complete; Ajay's personality was completely removed from his body. Vina had not been able to establish a close relationship with this new personality, though she had kept in some contact with him, primarily due to sentimentality. That meant that she was informed when Ajay's physical body was found last month with a bullet hole between his eyes.

She does not know if the killer was targeting Ajay or the new personality, but she feels she owes it to the memory of her brother to look into it. As the runners explore, they'll find several other similar deaths happened around the same time Ajay was killed—and all of them were head cases. Is someone out there deliberately hunting victims of CFD? If so, who? And who is paying them to do it?

DENVER TWO-STEP

Two Denver-based Mr. Johnsons approach the players. They tell the story of Maggie Dominquez, who had no official position but had been effectively serving as the mayor of the newly formed Aztlan sector of town. Dominquez was found dead in her bed, and the official autopsy declared the death as cardiac arrest, despite her relatively young age of forty-eight. Both Mr. Johnsons claim it was not a case of natural causes—Dominquez was assassinated. Both Mr. Johnsons want the runners to prove this is the case. The only difference is who they want to pin it on. One wants the ultimate responsibility tied to Ghostwalker's people; the other wants it connected to "the annoying elf in the clown makeup," meaning Harlequin. The runners need to decide which contract to take—or if the want to get themselves involved in that ongoing mess.

A DOZEN DECOYS

Want a hard target? Take Kayo Shoji, CEO of Mitsuhama subsidiary Pentacle Distribution. With the number of corporate and free spirit enemies she has made, she believes she can't be too careful. So she made a dozen of her—twelve women, all bio-sculpted to look identical to her, all Awakened, and all capable of making their auras look alike. Shoji has had her extras fill in for her on several different occasions, to the point if no one is ever certain if they are getting the real deal or a mere copy. This presents a problem for runners wishing to collect on the six-figure open contract on her life, as it is very difficult to find the Shoji who is supposed to be taken out. Do they engage in some in-depth research to figure out which person is the real Shoji? Or do they just start taking Shojis out, one by one, with the certainty that eventually they'll get the right one?

HUNTING THE HUNTERS

Reno Pyatt, fixer from the bar Reno's in Downtown Seattle, has a price on his head. Fortunately he is in touch enough with the criminal element to have some idea how much traction the contract is getting. Unfortunately,

today his information came in a little late. Word is someone (or multiple someones) have accepted the contract and intend on taking their shot within the next forty-eight hours. The players are hired to stop them. Question is, do they go out and try to track the team down, or do they hunker down at Reno's with their client and prepare to defend against whatever is going to happen? Whatever they decide, if they can get Reno through the next two days, they will earn a valuable friend.

KILL THE CARRIER

Dr. Edna Steuben boarded a plane in Lagos earlier this morning. She is due to land in Denver about eighteen hours after she took off. Mr. Johnson tells the runners that Dr. Steuben has been infected with a bio-engineered virus that will activate the moment she steps out of the airplane. Anyone who comes within a meter of her has a good chance of being infected by a virus that is extraordinarily deadly and incurable. Mr. Johnson says the runners can handle things as they see fit, but he recommends taking Steuben out as soon as possible—the less she breathes, the fewer people she will put at risk. The runners need to decide if they have any other alternative, or even if they trust that Mr. Johnson is telling the truth. And they have very little time.

ORK UPRISING

Legendary ork decker William "Bull" MacCallister has survived a lot—hundreds of runs, just about that many bullets heading his way, and a good handful of explosions to go along with it. He's been damaged plenty, but he has survived. Though he has no interest in playing politics, he has become one of the recognized leaders of the Ork Underground, which has put him squarely in the crosshairs of anti-Underground forces—who have some pretty highly placed connections. More than one assassin group is coming Bull's way, and the runners better keep him safe if they want the money he is dangling in front of them. The cramped quarters of the Ork Underground will present some challenges to this work, but will also provide plenty of places where runners can hide and lie in wait—as long as they are not themselves ambushed before they can get set.

SPARKING THE KEG

Mr. Johnson wants someone dead. The trick is, he doesn't know who. Two gangs that had been rivals—the Awakened-heavy Specters and the thrill gang Ragers, have started to move toward a détente, with senior members among the leadership of both gangs planning ways to work together. The planning is very delicate, though, as there is a lot of distrust and ill will between the gangs. Mr. Johnson is a black-market arms dealer who does not want peace between the gangs, as that would cut into his business. He would like the runners to take someone out, someone whose death would re-ignite tension between the gangs and break off any potential alliance. He does not have enough gang knowledge, though, to know who the best person to take out would be in order to accomplish his desired goal. The runners will have to do some subtle legwork to determine the mark, and then take that person out nice and clean.

THE WATCHING OF RED CHIEF

Fashion designer Vinci Caratini recently defected from Mitsuhama to Horizon, and the transition left a trail of bad feelings. He has received word of several possible threats against him, including ones that may be directed at his son, Gianni. The runners are assigned to stay with Gianni and keep him alive. If they can eliminate any threats closing in on Gianni, so much the better. The job seems posh at first—Gianni travels in luxurious circles—but soon the true difficulty of the job becomes clear, as Gianni is a self-absorbed, drug-abusing, misogynist son of a bitch. Spending time with him means watching him endanger pedestrians every time he sits behind the wheel of his Porsche Aguilar, blow more money on pharmaceuticals in a day than many families spend in a month, and treating every woman he encounters as an object for his pleasure or an annoyance to be disposed of. This might motivate the runners to get the job done as soon as possible by taking out the prospective assassins, but if they're observant, things will get worse. They'll notice that Gianni seems to be covering up for the disappearance of at least one former girlfriend and plotting the "disappearance" of another. The runners might find themselves asking whether they are on the right side of this particular job.

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THE CLOAK OF DEATH

It's thick. Luxurious. Concealing. The cloak of death will make you feared, envied, and maybe even wealthy. It will also smother your soul. The best assassins in the Sixth World can gain untold wealth and make the whole world shake, but they also will be hunted and stalked until the end of their days. Assuming their conscience doesn't eat them alive.

Hard Targets is a shadowrunner's guide to bringing death, with information on getting into wetwork, tactics for doing the job, and critical gear. It also contains plot details and adventure hooks, including an in-depth look at the city of Havana in the Caribbean League, a political and criminal hotspot that lends itself to all sorts of wetwork jobs. The work is there—if you can deaden your soul enough to take it.

Hard Targets is a Deep Shadows book for use with ***Shadowrun, Fifth Edition***.

SHADOWRUN
FIFTH EDITION

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